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Andrew Sinclair on Sam Spiegel

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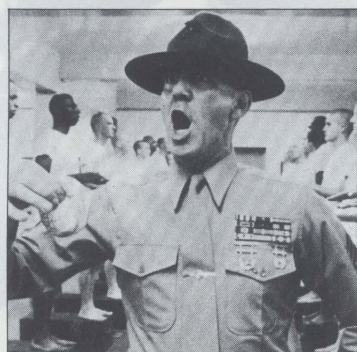
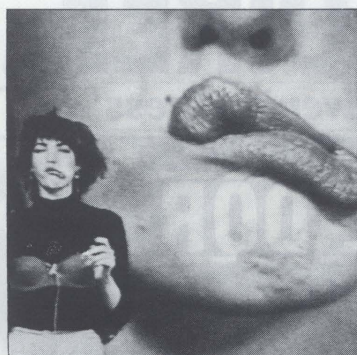
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SIGHT & SOUND

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On the cover:
 Tilda Swinton in Derek Jarman's
 'The Last of England'.
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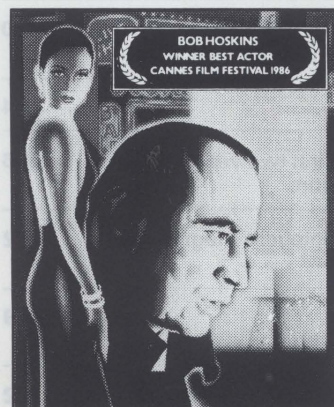
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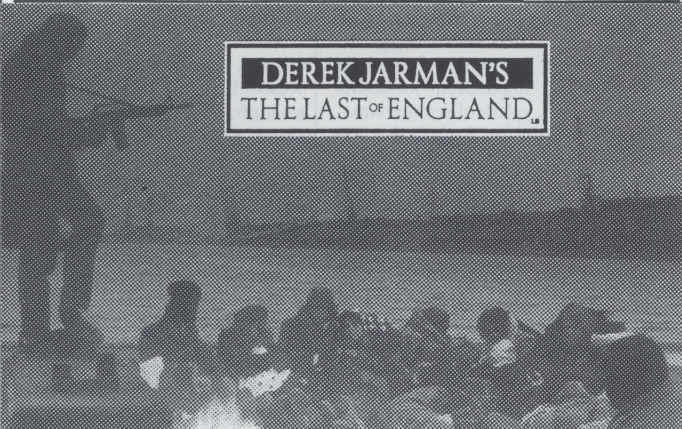


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ISABELLE HUPPERT in PAUL COX's internationally acclaimed film



DEREK JARMAN'S THE LAST OF ENGLAND.





Andrew Grieve filming *On the Black Hill*. Photo: David Appleby. More pictures page 264.

On the Black Hill

Spirit of place

A glorious morning in the Brecon Beacons. A pair of hikers, plump sunburned thighs glowing below white shorts, come striding down a hillside track, chatting cheerfully, and are taken aback to find themselves shushed into silence by a T-shirted young man wielding a walkie-talkie. A little further down the track, two figures approach leading chestnut horses: Bob Peck, in leggings, cap and green corduroy waistcoat, and Gemma Jones, in full Victorian skirts of funereal black. They're making for a handsome white-walled Welsh farmhouse just up ahead; though today, thanks to the attentions of the art department, the walls look grimy, and a bush or two sprouts from the chimney-stack.

All this (except of course the hikers) is part of the penultimate day's shoot on Andrew Grieve's film, *On the Black Hill*. Quite a small part, at that: today includes eight set-ups, split across two widely separated locations and some 81 years of screen time. First call was at 5 a.m. An extended day, but not untypical of what has been, by general consensus, an exceptionally arduous and demanding shoot. Despite which, everyone seems cheerful and relaxed. There's the mood of people who have worked well and—on the whole—harmoniously together, and can feel proud of what they've achieved.

The film is based on Bruce

Chatwin's novel, published in 1982—a subtle, richly atmospheric tale, set on the Welsh Marches and tracing the lives of twin brothers, born on a hill-farm, from 1900 to 1980. Andrew Grieve, who knows and loves the border country, read the book and immediately set about securing an option—in the face of initial reluctance from Chatwin, who didn't think it could be effectively filmed. Though Grieve has been active in the industry for 25 years, *On the Black Hill* will be his first cinematic feature as director. (His only previous full-length work was a remake last year, for American tv, of Hitchcock's *Suspicion*, with Anthony Andrews in the Cary Grant role. Grieve disclaims responsibility for the whole idea.) Before that he was an assistant director—to Ken Loach, William Friedkin and Tony Richardson, among others. He wrote his own script for *Black Hill*, with the help of development money from Channel 4; the film is being produced and financed by the BFI, with British Screen and Channel 4 putting up additional backing.

The script calls for every season, from deepest snowbound winter to high summer; obligingly enough, the weather provided them all within the seven-week shoot. Not just luck, as Jenny Howarth, the producer, points out: 'We checked local weather records as far back as they go, and chose the seven weeks that showed the widest range. We lost half a day when we had a hurricane,' she adds nonchalantly. 'It slowed us down—but it looks wonderful on film.'

So, one gathers, should the whole production. Determined to

avoid the cosy, Hovis-ad view of the rural past, all sepia-tinged nostalgia, Grieve has opted for the 'bleach bypass' photographic process (also used for Wajda's *Danton* and Michael Radford's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) to give his period scenes a harsh immediacy. 'It gives you the *solidity* of things—it seems to delve deeper,' observes the cinematographer, Thaddeus O'Sullivan. One result, everyone agrees, has been to make *Black Hill* a very 'un-English-looking' film. In explaining what it *does* look like, people cite John Ford Westerns, *Padre Padrone*, *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, even the cinema of the Australian outback.

Given a story so predicated on the spirit of place, authenticity has to be fundamental. No sets or studio shots; everything, interiors included, has been filmed on location in the area, almost always with ambient sound. No doubles, either. The four principal actors—Mike and Bob Gwilym as the twins, Bob Peck and Gemma Jones as their parents—have all done their own farmwork, riding, ploughing, shearing or hedging as required. One scene called for the essentially urban Peck to handle a horse-drawn plough in torrential rain. 'They tell me I ploughed a pretty straight furrow,' he recalls.

Chatwin's novel is structured around dichotomies, evoking the tensions born of age-old conflict—Welsh against English, farmers against gentry, tradition against change and social turmoil—within the microcosm of one locality, one family. It's this resonance that Andrew Grieve has aimed to capture, an end to which all production values, how-

ever scrupulous, are only the means. 'I don't want any awards for costume, make-up, whatever. If they give you those, it means they're not noticing anything else.' Despite the restrictions of a skin-tight budget—£750,000, allowing for next to no contingency—he feels 'we got close, very close, to the ideal of what I wanted. There's very little I'd do again, even if we'd had the money. Which we didn't.' Although, as Bob Peck says, 'It just seems a shame—given all the talent involved—that it's had to be made under those conditions, with no time for retakes or second thoughts. Everything has to be right the first time. It's what happens so often with British films.'

Meanwhile, somewhere in the depths of Brazil, and no doubt in rather different conditions, Werner Herzog is filming another of Chatwin's books, *The Viceroy of Ouidah*, with Klaus Kinski in the title role. The comparison should be instructive, at the very least.

PHILIP KEMP

Edinburgh

Britain, the Soviet Union and Peter Watkins

The 41st Edinburgh Festival did not vouchsafe any minor miracles like *My Beautiful Laundrette*, nor did it break any box-office records. But it could be accounted a reasonably solid success. Jim Hickey's programme included a whole group of new British films which were more than able to match the rest of the international fare, and a posse of Soviet films that proved cultural *glasnost* clearly more than just a passing phenomenon. That should have been enough. But some grumbled at the absence of anything remotely like a masterpiece, as if it were Edinburgh's job to find one where many another festival has failed this year.

Certainly, neither Alan Parker's *Angel Heart*, the opening film at the Playhouse, nor Mary Lambert's *Siesta*, which closed the proceedings at the local Cannon, could qualify. Parker's coruscating film noir-cum-horror story is unquestionably a virtuoso piece of film-making but in the end disappears up the tunnel of its own pretensions; while Lambert's first feature, heavily re-edited at the last moment, still looks as if this prominent rock video director hasn't yet come to terms with the strict sense of narrative flow that a good thriller needs.

The nearest of the films hailing from America to look like a typical Edinburgh discovery was Tim Hunter's *River's Edge*. Once

considered virtually unshowable on the American circuits but, after a sudden dollop of critical praise, a very respectable success there, *River's Edge* is one of those Corman-esque pictures about the 'blank generation' of American teenagers, based on a real-life and apparently motiveless murder of a 14-year-old girl by her 16-year-old boyfriend. It is a hard-edged, disturbing movie which talks not of adolescent deprivation but of teenagers with direct access to the goodies of the consumer society who have a startling disaffection for the world thereby created.

The British films included Don Boyd's *Aria*, better received than at Cannes and by no means a total failure; Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*, a defiant fist shaken in the face of Thatcher's Britain but hardly likely, with virtually no script or discernible storyline, to persuade producers to find him the money to make more films like *Caravaggio*; and two BFI-supported productions—Frontroom's *The Love Child*, directed by Robert Smith, and Peter Wollen's *Friendship's Death*. The former is modest, small-scale and likeable, a comedy whose cast includes Sheila Hancock, Peter Capaldi and Alexei Sayle's voice as a talking toilet. It doesn't amount to a lot but was very well received. Wollen's film has Bill Paterson as a journalist and Tilda Swinton as an envoy from a distant planet holed up in a room in Amman during 1970's Black September. It looks like a short story over-extended to feature film length, but Wollen's innate intelligence, and an imaginative conclusion, are enough to keep one going.

If neither Bill Forsyth's *The Housekeeper* nor Bill Douglas' *Comrades* adorned the programme—an ungenerous act by the two distributors concerned, when you think how the Festival nurtured both Scottish directors—there was at least Mike Alexander's *Gramsci*. Commissioned by Channel 4 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the death in captivity of the most humane Marxist of all, it is a tribute that weaves together interviews, archive material and dramatised sequences (John Sessions playing Gramsci sensitively) with some skill and a real feeling for its subject. Gramsci's shoddy treatment by the Left as well as by the Fascists is not mentioned. But at least the remark of the judge who sentenced him ('We must prevent this brain functioning for twenty years') is included, and the film shows how unsuccessful the prison authorities were in attempting to comply with those cruel instructions.

At Edinburgh there is always argument, some of it pretty silly, such as when Harry Hook's *The*

Kitchen Toto, made in Kenya and set during the period of Mau Mau revolt prior to independence, was accused by some of racism and chauvinism—two charges of which it is surely innocent. The film's story of Mwangi, the African kitchen toto, abused in a white policeman's family home and terrified by having to swear a blood oath of loyalty to the insurgents, is handled with warm intelligence throughout. And so, for the most part, is Lezli-An Barrett's Liverpoolian saga, *Business as Usual*, which has Glenda Jackson as the assistant manager of a dress-shop sacked for objecting to the manager's sexual harassment of Cathy Tyson's assistant, and the union embattled in the attempt to reinstate her. What's good about the film is the warmth and dynamism of the performances. Politically, it is surely a little naive in suggesting that Militant's way ahead is better than that of compromising union officialdom, but that's a matter of opinion. It is not the polemic that's the strength of *Business as Usual* but the way it tries hard to understand people.

For all their lacks and hesitations, most of the new British films on view did give the impression of being a great deal livelier and more inventive than any group of work coming from either Europe or America in the independent sector. And this despite the almost total neglect by the present Government and all the financial difficulties.

The Soviet Union is a different matter. There is invention and feeling enough emanating from

there just now, as the Edinburgh programme evinced. *Is It Easy to Be Young?*, the documentary about disaffected youth, was certainly not the best of the Russian films on view, but almost as certainly the most surprising. As the excellent essay by Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov included in the programme says, it would be unwise to be reassured by the film that young people are the same the world over, even though the testaments of the Afghanistan conscripts seem word for word the same as those of returning American draftees from Vietnam. The point is that Westerners can no longer argue that it is the unique evils of unemployment and/or the consumer society that cause the trouble.

Peter Watkins, of course, might argue, as he certainly does in his mammoth *The Journey*, that it is the destructive race for nuclear supremacy, and the feeling that it might well end in disaster, that causes young people everywhere to object to the world their parents and grandparents have created. I have now seen eight of *The Journey*'s 14 hours, and find it both surprising and wearisomely predictable—a melange of conversations and images that continually put up conflicting evidence. It is surprising because it really does supply the evidence as to how we are manipulated by the media's view of things, and it is wearisome because you scarcely hear a word from ordinary people who are not members of the Peace Movement. But an extraordinary achievement it

certainly is, especially when you appreciate that it is not meant to be seen straight off as at Berlin or Edinburgh but digested over a much longer period. The first political soap opera, in fact, with the hopeful message that ordinary people might still be able to have a voice in the way society is run, like those young Russians in *Is It Easy to Be Young?*.

DEREK MALCOLM

Hellraiser

From horror fiction to horror movies

In a gutted North London mansion that, conveniently for the publicity people, is supposed to be haunted, Clive Barker was—with apparent ease—making his directorial debut. Best known as a groundbreaking author of short (the *Books of Blood*) and long (*The Damnation Game*) horror fiction, Barker turned to direction after a disappointing foray into screenwriting.

Hellraiser resulted from a team-up between Barker and former assistant director Christopher Figg. Figg wanted to produce and Barker to direct and, after discarding several stories from the *Books of Blood*, they hit on an original idea ('three people in a house, and things happen') intended mainly as a showreel. Barker wrote it up into a novella, *The Hellbound Heart*, for an American anthology, *Night Visions 3*, which he shares with other leading lights in the current literary horror generation, Lisa Tuttle and Ramsey

Peter Watkins' *The Journey*.



Campbell. New World stayed with the project after their co-financiers Virgin withdrew. In response to a suggestion that *Hellraiser* is an American film shot in Britain, Figg claims, 'It's as American as the *Mayflower*.'

Although an admirer of the baroque splatter of Dario Argento, Barker says he is not imitating any particular school of film horror. 'We're telling a strong story and therefore the rococo flourishes which distract are redundant. We're not cheating. We're not putting in point of view shots of creatures which do not exist. There are always pay-offs to hints like that. We show the monsters, the horrors. That was always the thing with the short stories. We're giving the audience the goods.'

'The movie is a perverse love story, and if any element is going to deter people, it'll be the perversity. The line between pleasure and pain, between violence and desire, is so fine, and I find that an interesting ambiguity. I'm not saying this isn't a horror film. Directors will say, "*Firestarter* isn't a horror film, it's a human drama." Give me a break. This is a horror film, and unapologetically so. What we were trying to do is collide this very strange, dark, forbidden imagery with really nice pictures.'

Barker hoped that the rock group Coil would score the film (New World overruled him), and gleefully claimed that he had selected them because 'it's the only music I've heard on disc that I've taken off because it made my bowels churn,' although his publicist tactfully suggested that cinema managements might prefer it if that last quote read '... made my spine chill'.

Hellraiser: the pinhead cenobite.



Having turned down an offer to write *Alien 3* and completed a doorstopping fantasy novel, *Weaveworld*, Barker plans to take a budgetary step up and do a special-effects fantasy for a big studio. 'If films were my profession, I'd happily climb the ladder rung by rung and make three small pictures. But I'm commissioned to write another novel and I'm doing a children's book and a couple of other projects and I'd like to do some more theatre in the not too distant future. I want to put the complex, metaphysical notions into books where they belong, and I want to do summer pictures, which are a different kind of thing.'

The difference between Barker's fiction and film is the difference between *The Hellbound Heart* and *Hellraiser*. A minor character in the original has been turned into the second lead in the adaptation and polished up as a more or less conventional heroine. 'I liked the fact that in the novella the girl was a total loser. You can live with someone like that for the length of a novella. You can't for a movie.'

'I think New World are hoping *Hellraiser* will appeal to a few people who wouldn't go to *House 2* or *Creepshow 2*, that word of mouth will attract people to its slight off-centredness. There are lots of monsters. We've got all the weird stuff in there, a lot of action. I believe the thing to do is go out there and scare people. But this isn't one of those pictures where you cast the twelve most good-looking youths in California, and then murder them. We've cast people because they are terrific actors, and then murdered them.'

KIM NEWMAN

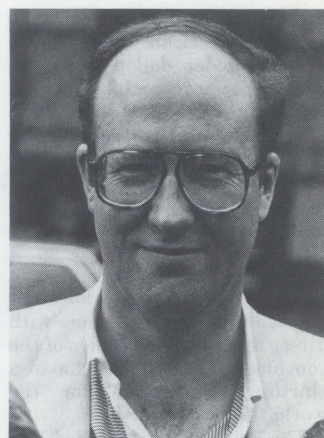
World film

Twenty-five years of the 'International Film Guide'

A silver jubilee in film publishing will be notched up in November when the 1988 edition of the *International Film Guide* goes on sale. The *Guide* was a child of the early 60s when serious interest in the cinema achieved a currency greater than ever before—or since. Peter Cowie, the *Guide*'s editor and only begetter, went up to Cambridge in 1959, eyes newly opened by the discovery of Ingmar Bergman, and joined a circle of cinephiles determined that *Granta* would not let *Oxford Opinion* make all the running in the matter of new critical perspectives. The momentum which in the next few years fuelled *Movie* and shorter-lived ventures such as *Motion* also led to stirrings in the virtually barren field of British film book publishing.

In the 1940s, Cowie's father published a series of successful antiques yearbooks. The impetus for the *Guide* came when Peter Cowie inherited the Tantivy Press imprint, albeit with 'not a penny of assets'. The first, 1964, edition appeared in 1963. For 7s 6d (37½p), readers were offered an agenda which was to remain broadly the same, though considerably expanded, over the next quarter-century: a world production survey, and sections on festivals, magazines, bookshops, film schools, specialist cinemas. There were two one-off items, a succinct 'dictionary of film terms' and a perhaps oversuccinct 'outline guide' to the *Nouvelle Vague*. Five thousand copies of the first edition were printed by a Dutch company which advanced credit on the strength of its dealings with Cowie père; and the New York concern of A. S. Barnes and Co offered to handle nearly half the total—a relationship which has continued to the present.

This was, of course, the heyday of the *auteur*, a fact reflected by the *Guide*'s essays on five 'directors of the year'. The first were Visconti, Welles, Truffaut, Wajda and Hitchcock; ready reference guides to even such household names as these were at the time far from widely available. The feature was nostalgically modelled, Cowie recalls, on *Wisden*'s five cricketers of the year, ground rules for which decreed no repeat appearances. Over the next 20 editions, 100 film-makers were singled out, by which time, 'We were scraping the barrel, and anyway the battles had all long ago been won—everyone gets his name over the title now, even Tobe Hooper.' Today the *Guide* has a



Peter Cowie.

running series of national dossiers, started by Cowie's part-time associate editor, Derek Elley.

But Cowie emphasises that it is the international production survey which lies at the heart of the undertaking, and the key is comprehensiveness. The next edition includes a first-time entry on Kampuchea and sees Venezuela back after a brief hiatus. 'Some of the African and Latin American countries do tend to be very up and down,' the editor admits. 'There might have been an earthquake or a putsch, or they may not have made any films that year.' There can also be political in-fighting: Chinese advertising was withdrawn over the inclusion of a despatch from Taiwan.

During the years to 1980, sales rose to some 16,000 copies. Since then they have levelled off. The situation, Cowie says, is a constant battle, but the *Guide* makes a modest profit and he looks ahead with qualified optimism. Incorporating video remains a problem, but Cowie hopes colour photographs will increase the appeal of the enlarged-format 1988 edition, the cover price of which now stands at £8.50. As opposed to the shrinking pages of publishers' advertisements, one section of the *Guide* has steadily grown: 200 film festivals are listed around the world. Cowie interprets this positively. 'We have to accept that the early 60s, when everybody wanted to know about Resnais and Godard, aren't going to come back. But if you look at what a festival like Pordenone is doing, you realise we are taking more care of the cinema's past now than we ever did then.'

In terms of media coverage, Cowie feels the *Guide* has been something of a prophet without honour (conceivably because it has refrained from playing the 'state of British cinema' card?), but he hopes its anniversary, which is to be marked by an NFT season in December, may help to rectify this. There ought to be

some mileage at any rate in the polls of correspondents' choices of the best films from their own territories during the book's history and their composite selection from world cinema during the period. Early soundings seem to indicate that it is the films of directors who became established before the *Guide's* launch which are to the fore. Fellini is making a particularly strong showing with Bergman and Kurosawa coming up on the rails.

TIM PULLEINE

Locarno

Creeping conservatism of the European audience

Locarno was the second festival to turn forty this year, but it carried its age more lightly than its cousin on the Riviera. One reason is that it has an explicit, constitutional commitment to 'new authors, new cinemas', which limits its 18-film competition to early work of youngish directors. Another is that its evening screenings are not black-tie affairs but huge communal get-togethers in the open air of the town's main piazza, where the only suggestion of a bunker is the armoured black projection-box erected by the sidewalk cafés. The genial David Streiff, in his sixth year as festival director, somehow persuaded Swiss distributors to let him screen a selection of hits from Cannes for crowds of up to 7,500 in the piazza at night, and celebrated the festival's birthday by mounting a parallel retrospective of highlights from its history—from *Lady in the Lake* to the Terence Davies *Trilogy*. Bills and dues paid, he was left free to pursue 'new cinema' at the two-screen Festival Centre on the outskirts of town; wherein lies a problem that says a lot about the prospects for cinema in Europe.

Thousands turned out for the mainstream art movies in the piazza and, on the whole, stayed to applaud Fellini cavorting through yet another phase of his relentlessly colourful past, Wenders rehashing the themes of *Paris, Texas* in the form of what looked like a homage to Walter Ruttmann, and so on. But the same audience had little patience for most of the films in competition; anything in any way challenging sent a significant proportion scurrying for the exits. The overall level of films in competition was undeniably low, but you couldn't help noticing that the two excellent movies that won the top prizes were precisely the two movies that suffered the highest walk-out rates. That may say something about the films young directors are making these days, but it

probably says more about the creeping conservatism of the European audience.

An eminently sensible jury (headed by the wonderful Swiss architect Mario Botta) gave the Grand Prix to a first feature from Portugal: José Álvaro Morais' *O Bobo (The Jester)*, a film substantially shot six years ago that has been labouring through post-production ever since. It finally emerged from the labs the day before its festival screening. It's set in 1978, at the start of the right-wing backlash against the Portuguese Revolution, and concerns a group of friends who are trying to stage a play in the derelict studios of Lisboa Filmes. The play in question is an adaptation of Alexandre Herculano's novel *The Jester*, a mythic romance that dances through Portuguese history and serenades issues of national identity. About half the film comprises scenes from the play, brilliantly designed as *cinema*, to evoke a long-vanished studio tradition; the other half offers an engagingly self-critical account of the sexual and ethical confusions of Morais' generation. It's the kind of film that leaves a non-Portuguese viewer begging for footnotes, but its aesthetic authority is enough to override worries about the precise meanings of all the cultural and historical references. I have probably made it sound like a film of the Rivette school, but the truth is that it's closer to a modernist *Red Shoes*.

The Grand Prix Spécial du Jury went to Edward Yang's

Kongbufenzi (The Terroriser), a jigsaw-puzzle of a movie in which a delinquent girl locked up by her mother makes prank telephone calls that change the course of several lives. Like Yang's *Taipei Story*, the film cuts a detailed cross-section through contemporary city life in Taiwan, with an acute sensitivity to the gap between economic and emotional growth. Here, though, the sheer intricacy of the structure becomes a point in itself—as the film acknowledges in its closing scenes, with an ironic nod to the way that fiction tidies up life's loose ends. The Borgesian delight in a symmetrical narrative ultimately brings the film a little closer to genre cinema than Yang's other work. I prefer the seeming sprawl of *Taipei Story*, but there's no doubt that Yang has the best eye since Antonioni for settings, colours and compositions that speak unspoken thoughts.

A few other competition films were also noteworthy. Stanley Kwan's *Dixia Qing (Love unto Waste, from Hong Kong)* anatomises a knot of ruinously shallow relationships between young people and pulls off a minor coup in the unexpected closing scene, in which two characters speak to each other candidly for the first time. Gyula Gazdag's *Hol Volt, Hol Nem Volt (A Hungarian Fairy Tale)* is a weirdly fantastical social problem picture about an orphan in search of a father who never existed; the shifts from a realist idiom into black comedy and wish-fulfilment dreams are genuinely

disconcerting. And Yamamoto Masashi's *Robinson no Niwa (Robinson's Garden, Japan)* is the oddest fable on the lure of unruly nature since Andrew Marvell went fruit-picking: a solitary young woman takes over an abandoned warehouse in Tokyo and blurs the distinction between house and garden, but mysteriously ends up subsumed by the green.

No festival in 1987 has been complete without one or two long-banned Soviet films newly released from the vaults. Locarno scored high in this unofficial competition by securing Kira Muratova as a member of the jury and having her bring her early features *Korotkie Vstrechi (Brief Meetings, 1967)* and *Dolgie Provody (Long Farewells, 1971)*. Miraculously, neither has dated at all. Both centre on women trying to cope on their own: in *Brief Meetings* a harassed bureaucrat (played by Muratova herself) whose charismatic, unfaithful husband is a geologist often away on field trips, in *Long Farewells* a divorcee whose frantic determination to keep her teenage son is steadily driving the boy to flee in search of his father. There are sharp attacks on official dishonesty and hypocrisy, but the main point of both films is to bring fresh and unprejudiced eyes to tight emotional conundrums. Muratova's later films are reportedly less original, but I'm already impatient to see what she makes of a planned adaptation from Somerset Maugham.

TONY RAYNS

O Bobo (The Jester).



Edinburgh TV Festival

Embattled broadcasters

Under the rubric 'Television Fights Back', the 1987 Edinburgh festival concerned itself with the increasingly hostile environment in which television now finds itself. As Phillip Whitehead stated in the opening MacTaggart Lecture, the British broadcasting system as a whole has never been under such sustained attack, whether from 'the hidden hand of the market, the mailed fist of Government', or the latter's vociferous allies in the press.

He singled out for special opprobrium those proprietors who use their papers to further their own considerable broadcasting interests, discrediting the public service system in the hope of contributing to its dismemberment and then gobbling up the most lucrative pieces. Behind the press leitmotiv that television is elitist, out of touch, peopled by 'poseurs in sharp suits and pointy headed perverts and pinkoes', Whitehead discerned 'the brute strength of the argument of consumer sovereignty', the idea that television's only business should be the maximising of audiences even if this means wall-to-wall *Dallas*. He warned against the temptation to give in, to turn 'programme into product' and to self-censor in the face of moral panic and government pressure. Instead it was time to go back to the 'copybook headings', to engage in dispassionate enquiry along the Annan lines and to examine how regulated diversity can best be fostered and protected.

Inevitably Whitehead's lecture covered ground already explored in Sir Denis Forman's Dimpleby Lecture, but it provided a lucid introduction to issues that were to be examined in detail in later sessions. One of these was indeed devoted to television and the press, although difficulty in finding any press persons willing to take part had made this an extremely hard session to organise. In the event, the case against Fleet Street was made by a special *What the Papers Say* hosted by Godfrey Hodgson, which was answered by David Montgomery (ex-editor of *News of the World* and now editor of *Today*), John Leese (editor of the *London Evening Standard*) and Bruce Anderson (deputy editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*).

Frankly, it was a pretty dispiriting experience which amply bore out Whitehead's and Hodgson's strictures. Both Montgomery and Leese argued that television was elitist and didn't

offer the viewers enough choice, and rather pompously stated that since television was a 'public monopoly' it was a proper subject of press concern. Countless speakers from the floor then pointed out that the increasing monopolisation of the press was a matter of no little import. The debate never got beyond this level of charge and counter-charge, and it was particularly disappointing that no press campaigns against specific programmes were discussed and that no programme-makers spoke at all. Perhaps they were worried about what the papers might say about their next production?

The same rather sterile atmosphere dominated the next debate. Entitled 'The Thatcher Years: Broadcasting and the Government', it was kicked off by three Tory MPs: Roger Gale on new forms of funding broadcasting, Gerald Howarth on the need for greater regulation of programme content and Richard Holt on left-wing bias in broadcasting. Again it was largely a matter of mutual mud-slinging: the MPs accused the broadcasters of being out of touch, arrogant, irresponsible and biased and the broadcasters accused the politicians of wanting to wield the big stick.

The most fruitful sessions were those that addressed themselves to specific issues and/or avoided the conventional debate formula. The most successful straight debate was clearly that on the subject of independent access to the BBC and ITV, largely because all the speakers addressed specific subjects and there was a fair amount of give and take between participants (unlike last year's debacle on the same subject). Also highly revealing was the 'dramatised' session in which six British producers had to 'pitch' their programmes to a team of American buyers. Not only was this most entertaining, but it said more about the pressure placed on programme-makers by the demands of the American market than any more conventional approach to the subject.

Even more useful were the sessions devoted to 'The Craft of Programme Making', where the issues were allowed to arise naturally out of discussions of individual programmes. The session on *Life Story* raised fascinating questions about the making of drama out of the lives of real people; *Secret Society* explored the decision-making processes inside the BBC which lead to programmes being made and then banned. These were undoubtedly the most popular sessions. Certainly they are infinitely preferable to sitting with 700 other people in a huge hall, faced by a platform of men in suits intoning generalities and broken only by

invited contributions from the floor, overwhelmingly from those in the upper echelons of television who seem to have a compulsion to speak at length about anything and everything, even if we have heard it all before at half a dozen previous festivals.

JULIAN PETLEY

Studio

The RKO Story: Tales from Hollywood

Did you know that King Kong's inimitable roar, the creation of sound man Murray Spivack, was done by recording feeding-time for lions and tigers at the zoo, then reversing and superimposing the track? Or that the wind which so realistically ruffles Kong's fur as he climbs the Empire State was actually the imprint left by technicians' fingers as they shifted each of the 18-inch model's limbs through each movement in its stop-motion climb?

Such entrancing nuggets of information (the useless but priceless kind) turn up commonly enough in recorded interviews. The difference in the BBC's admirable six-part history of RKO, which had reserves to call on from the studio's archives in addition to its film library, is that the points or processes described are graphically demonstrated. Fascinating, for instance, to watch a series of clips from *Crossfire* illustrating Robert Ryan's graduation from GI Joe to rabid Jew-baiter, with Edward Dmytryk meantime explaining how, 'I started out with Bob Ryan with a 50mm lens because I wanted him to look perfectly normal. As we gradually went along, I went to a 40, to a 35, and eventually in the last third of the picture everything I shot with him was with a 25, to get that slight subliminal distortion which made him a different character.'

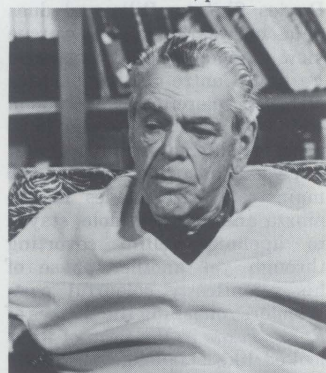
An equally vivid example develops out of a series of perceptions in the segment devoted exclusively to the Astaire-Rogers musicals. Hermes Pan (choreographic assistant) sets the ball rolling by describing the broken rhythm ('getting off the beat, on the beat, back and forth') that was Astaire's most idiosyncratic innovation. Pandro Berman (producer) picks it up by noting how Astaire was a rarity among dancers—like Keaton among silent comedians—in insisting on being shot full figure while in action. A cue for Maurice Zuberano (set designer) to talk about the spacious, white, Art Deco look conceived for the series by Berman; for Joseph Biroc (camera operator) to describe the problems involved in keeping

the dancers not only within the frame but within the lit areas of the set; and back to Zuberano to explain how, on *Follow the Fleet*, he tried to allow the cameraman to light in lower key by incorporating painted shadows in his sets. By the time you come to the end, you feel, exhilaratingly, almost as though you had made your own Astaire-Rogers movie.

There are bits and pieces like this to treasure throughout the series, ranging from the trickery which put a leopard that wasn't there on the end of the rope pulled by Katharine Hepburn in *Bringing Up Baby*, to a moment of insight into the demands of Orson Welles' imagination as Linwood Dunn (special effects) describes the model work he had to incorporate to achieve the illusion of Olympian finality as the camera lifts up and up from Dorothy Comingore on stage in *Citizen Kane*. All credit to Leslie Megahey and Alan Yentob (executive producers), Charles Chabot and Rosemary Wilton (producers) for a series which is bold, beautifully put together, and a pretty fair history of RKO. But there are reservations.

Inevitable, I suppose, that a bevy of ageing stars should be trotted on to gratify the fans. But need they have been so laxly guided (Astaire, poor soul, is the victim of an unseen interviewer who asks whether he thought he was 'making art' at the time) that they either say remarkably little or (like Ginger Rogers) are left to ramble along on ego trips. One would gladly trade the lot for more of the highly informative

Linwood Dunn, special effects; Pandro Berman, producer.



technicians who illuminate the art of making movies. By the same attention-grabbing token, one presumably has to accept that such trivia as Robert Mitchum's drug bust, Jane Russell's seamless bra, and Howard Hughes' sexual aberrations are going to be headlined in the episode devoted to RKO's last days.

Fair enough, except that pandering to expectations leads two of the segments into trouble. The third, 'A Woman's Lot', scratching around for a theme in the late 30s and coming up with little more than career résumés for Hepburn and Rogers, merely underlines its own lack of focus by making tentative, unrealised gestures towards a feminist approach. The last ('Howard's Way') is so single-mindedly focused on the Hughes debacle that the normally sober commentary, urbanely delivered by Edward Asner, roundly declares that no cinematic landmarks (the eclectic standard being set by such as the Astaire-Rogers movies, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Citizen Kane* and *The Cat People*) were made during the Hughes era, when the studio's output became 'a laughing-stock'. Draw up your own list in refutation, starting with RKO's remarkable record in *film noir*. The other four episodes are fine (devoted to the early sound years; Astaire-Rogers; Orson Welles; WWII/McCarthy/*film noir*), despite suffering from the curse of the callow interviewers whenever a movie star looms. Their come-uppance is served by a deadpan Robert Mitchum when asked whether the drug bust affected his career. 'Yeah,' he drawls, 'I couldn't play, for instance, Eagle scouts or Baptist preachers.'

TOM MILNE

Burning Blier

Wajda's Dostoevsky adaptation

Ailing and half-demented since the fire in the suburbs of his city, the Governor (Bernard Blier) spends his days at a luxury hotel somewhere in the South—perhaps the French or Italian Riviera—under the care of his daughter Lisa (Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu). The girl is in the park among the other hotel guests. The old man lies on a wicker chaise longue. He fiddles with a match and meticulously applies it to the blanket which covers him. Now Blier is replaced by a well-protected stuntman, the blanket soaked with fluid and lit by a gas flame from a long pipe attached to a portable cylinder. Seeing the blast, Lisa runs to her father, pulls back the blanket and cries out in horror...



Andrzej Wajda and Omar Sharif. Photo: Renata Pajchel.

The scene is being shot in the royal park Łazienki in Warsaw, with the last Polish king's orangery acting as the hotel's elegant facade. 'Ils sont sadiques, ces Polonais,' Blier said when everything was over and everybody safe. After two months' work, the shooting of Andrzej Wajda's film of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* is nearing completion. For years, Wajda has been involved with the great Russian's sinister novel. He staged Camus' adaptation at Cracow's Old Theatre in 1971, took it to London in 1971 and 73, presented the same production in Zurich in 1973 and in Rome and Florence in 1981. In 1974, Wajda produced *The Possessed* at the Yale Repertory Theatre. The then student Meryl Streep played Lisa.

Wajda long cherished the idea of a film. Gaumont finally took it up and the offer of facilities from the Polish TV company Poltel made the cost of production feasible. Jean-Claude Carrière, Buñuel's scriptwriter and the co-scenarist of *Danton*, wrote the script with Wajda. The selection of events from the novel differs from Camus' adaptation in that the film essentially centres on the story of Shatov's murder, of a terrorist group, of crime committed to consolidate the bunch of garrulous would-be reformers into a unit of unquestioning executioners. If Stavrogin is the hidden inspirer, Peter Verkhovenski is the leader, traitor and informer in one person. Another difference is Lisa's fate: to counterbalance the numerous deaths and murders, her life is spared and she is seen with her father in the epilogue.

Dostoevsky's own title—*Biesy*—translates as 'devils' or 'demons', and the film, like the book, focuses on how the forces of evil act in human lives and endeavours. 'Every so often,' Wajda said, 'Europe is amazed that some learned university professor, or some very kind woman, or some decent man is involved with a terrorist group. One tries to explain his or her reasons, to find excuses. But there are too many cases for simple explanations. Dostoevsky was very clearly aware of their reasons. In Peter Verkhovenski's words: "What they are afraid of is to be considered reactionaries. So they must be revolutionary. They would be ashamed to think independently... in consequence they will think as I'll want them to." There are many such people in the world today who think they absolutely have to be leftist. The reality of our countries—Gulag, the exposure of Stalin—has, of course, chilled the zeal of these intellectuals, but they still have a long way to go before they realise what's ahead of them.'

The first scenes of the film were shot in the grounds of Warsaw University, before the early nineteenth century Rector's Palace. Governor Blier appeared on a balcony facing an angry but subdued crowd of workers demanding their wages. Later scenes were filmed in other parts of the city and its environs, in the historical town of Piotrkow and the wild forest of Białowieża. Omar Sharif plays the subtle intellectual Stepan Trofimovitch, Peter Verkhovenski's father. I met him after the last scene in the film, in which, watching the suburbs burning, Trofimovitch

realises the wrongs of his life.

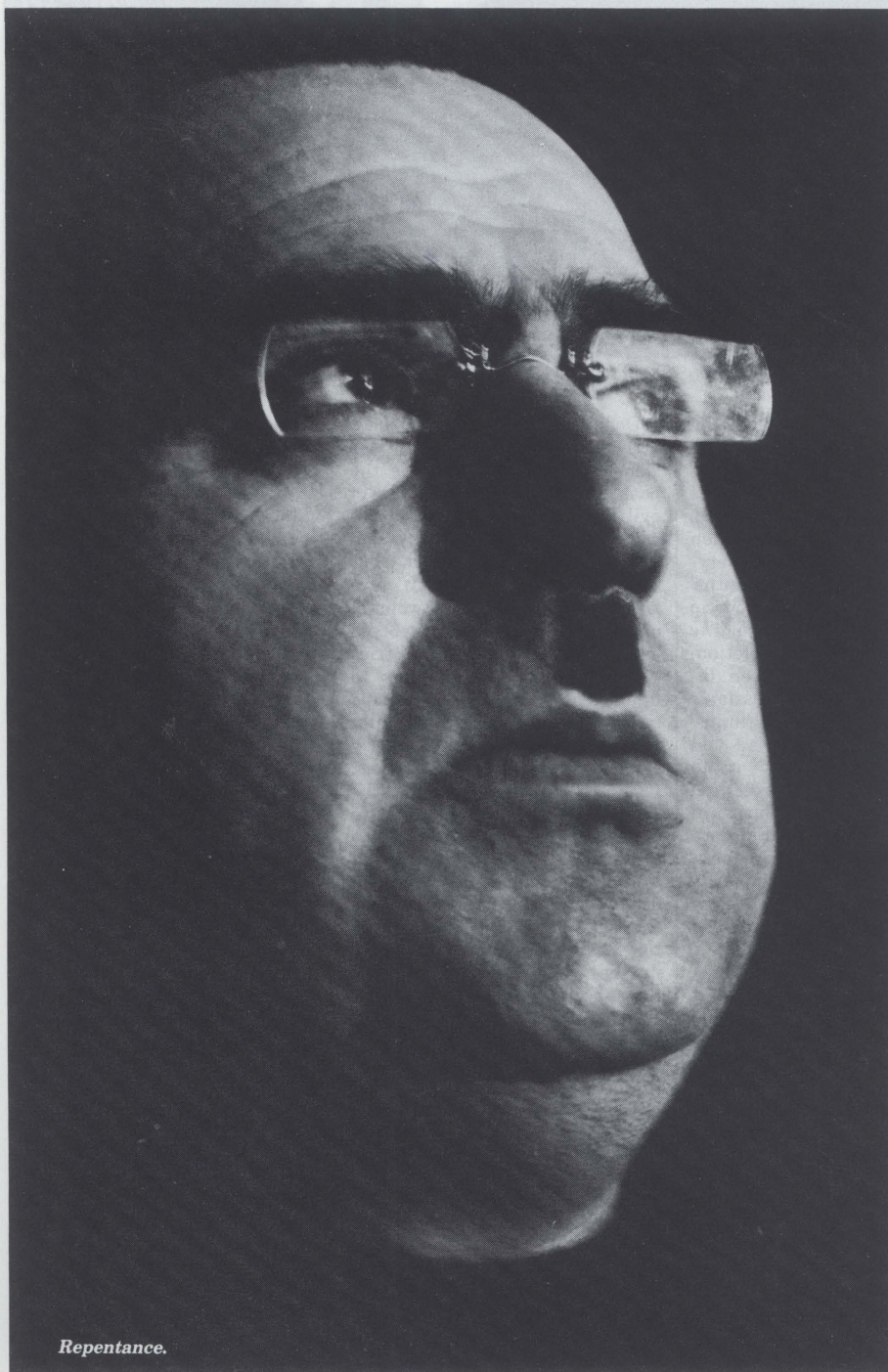
Sharif was pleased with his role. How had he found working in Poland? 'Of course the biggest difference is that there is less money involved in the production. This has its drawbacks, but also one great advantage: people don't think of their work in terms of money, they are interested in the film for its own sake. Take me, I came here because I wanted to work with Wajda. This was one of my dreams. I was furious when they told me that Wajda thought about me some two or three years ago, but was warned I would never accept because they couldn't afford to pay me. When I was finally asked, I said, "A Wajda film? Of course, I'm coming immediately..." Did they think I wouldn't want to play even a minor role with a great film-maker? I didn't have many scenes, but they were important. And I loved the way this man comes to a reckoning of his whole life. That's almost my own problem—I too am at the age when one begins to make an account of one's life.'

'I think this is going to be a good Wajda,' adds Sharif. 'And a good Wajda is really something.' Since the Polish film authorities showed no interest in the project, the film is a wholly French production, though made by a largely Polish crew. Apart from Jutta Lange (as Maria Lebiadkin) and Jerzy Radziwiłowicz (Shatov), the cast is mainly French: Jean-Philippe Ecoffey (Peter Verkhovenski), Isabelle Huppert (Maria Shatov) and Lambert Wilson (Stavrogin). *The Possessed* is scheduled to open in Paris in November.

WANDA WERTENSTEIN

GORBACHEV'S CINEMA

WILLIAM FISHER



Repentance.

'We need to restructure many things in our life, to give greater scope to the creativity of people, to new ideas and initiatives.'

—Mikhail S. Gorbachev

'It is unsettling that the term [*perestroika*—restructuring] has become for many in our country a demagogic concept ... The word is now being used to defend both a just and an unjust cause simply by standing up and waving a flag with *perestroika* on it.'

—Valentin Rasputin,
author of *Farewell to Matiora*

Even among the other audacious claims made at the Moscow Film Festival, the one by an unknown film-maker named Alexander Askoldov to have made 'the most expensive movie in the history of Soviet cinema' seemed preposterous. That distinction surely belongs to someone like Sergei Bondarchuk, the dean of extravagant Soviet costume drama. But never to this 55-year-old director with only a single feature to his credit. And even that film, *The Commissar*, was made over twenty years ago, while Bondarchuk was working on his seven-hour adaptation of *War and Peace*.

War and Peace went on to win an Oscar for Best Foreign Film; *The Commissar* went on to the shelf. According to the central Soviet film authority, Goskino, Askoldov had committed 'political errors' in his film. And the great 'expense' to which Askoldov referred is the twenty years spent fighting for the release of *The Commissar* while he fed his family by working odd jobs that included staging chorus numbers for can-can dancers. Now the film has finally received its premiere—albeit in an unofficial screening at the Union of Soviet Film-makers—and become the event of an otherwise uneventful Moscow Film Festival.

The Commissar is set during the Civil War that followed the October Revolution. A solo soprano singing a Hebrew lullaby, then a storm of formal flourishes—fragmentation, swish pans, rapid montage—set the film's rhythm and the

scene. An iron-willed Red Army commissar mercilessly orders a deserter to be shot. The viewer's doubletake confirms that this commissar is indeed a woman; and, we soon discover, she is pregnant. She leaves the army to have her child in the care of a Jewish family whose house has been seized. The White Army approaches, and she takes refuge with them in the cellar of their home. As the battle goes on above, the commissar has a vision: Soviet Jews, her host family among them, marked with Stars of David, are herded away to their destruction. At once the commissar puts on her uniform, leaves her child behind with the family, and runs towards the front as a single trumpet plays the Internationale.

The artistic and emotional impact of *The Commissar* is formidable. In 1966, while official Soviet film-makers like Bondarchuk were reworking historical and literary themes in prosaic realist terms, while Tarkovsky was developing his private visionary language, Alexander Askoldov had mastered a poetic, civic-minded style that reanimated the tradition of Dovzhenko and Eisenstein. Askoldov used the resources of the cinema—performance, music, lighting, camera movement, editing, framing—in a deftly constructivist fashion, creating counterpoint, even contradiction, to hurl the narrative dynamically forward. He drew with equal mastery on modern techniques like subjective camera and the use of wide screen.

Askoldov also succeeded in advancing complex moral claims that are more challenging than anything shown in the Soviet cinema—which must have made the film's summary suppression painfully predictable to him. He presents authority in the guise of a cruel Soviet officer. Through something like the miracle of *Virgin Birth* she is transformed into Mother Russia. Askoldov shows unimpeachable yet persecuted Jews who teach Russia a moral lesson. The director hints at Soviet complicity in the Nazi pogrom, at Stalin's appeasement of Hitler, at a connection between Nazi and Russian anti-semitism. Finally, Askoldov expresses international revolutionary sentiment as no Soviet film-maker has since the 1920s.

The Commissar is not only an obvious work of talent, imagination and intellect; it is one of the great films that have been made in the Soviet Union. Perhaps if Askoldov had accepted the authorities' charge against him in silence, he would have had the opportunity to make other films, as did any number of film-makers whose work was also suppressed.

Instead, he appealed his case, taking the issue to the highest levels, pushing so hard that Goskino finally responded by pronouncing him 'professionally incompetent' and, Askoldov claims, physically throwing him out of the door.

'After years of searching,' he recounts, 'I finally managed to get a job directing in the theatre. There I staged a performance where 2,500 spectators cheered on their feet for fifteen minutes. I created such an attraction. But still I had enemies, and I was then forbidden to work in the theatre—again on the grounds of "professional incompetence". Now my pain is finished.'

During the emotional press conference that followed the screening, an American film festival programmer ebulliently extended an invitation to Askoldov. *The Commissar* had been invited once before, in 1967, but never made it. 'For twenty years I and those who worked on the film had a joke,' Askoldov later responded. 'None of us may ever see the film again in our lifetime, but we can at least go to our graves knowing that we had been invited to some sort of posh cinema showcase on the other side of the planet.'

The West has fixed its imagination on the current changes taking place in the Soviet Union. But few developments there have inspired as much fancy as those in the cinema—the most rapidly changing and highly visible sector of Soviet culture. Just as western political pundits are divided over whether the goal of restructuring Soviet society is genuine democratisation or just plain image management, opinions on the cinema range from the enthusiasm expressed by that festival programmer to the cynicism of long-time Moscow festival visitors who have seen such initiatives at restructuring come and go in the past.

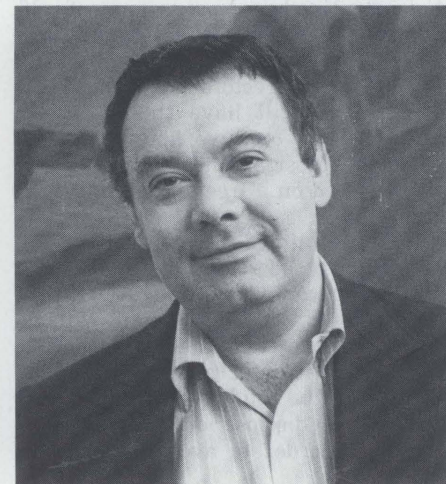
More optimistic observers have been given a measure of immediate gratification by Goskino, who have recently unveiled a number of the suppressed films made in the USSR over the last twenty years. It is impossible not to be enthusiastic about a daring film like the Georgian director Tengiz Abuladze's allegory of Stalinism, *Repentance* (1984), the most widely discussed of these pictures in the West. Gleb Panfilov's *The Theme* (1979) has also received much attention—if, unfortunately, less for its artistry than for its reference to a censored writer forced to work as a gravedigger while he awaits the opportunity to emigrate to Israel. Alexi Guermann's *My Friend Ivan Lapchine* (1984) tanta-

lises the western sensibility as well with its slice of life realism that frankly depicts the hardship and squalor of small town life on the eve of Stalin's purges. The domestic and international release of these films after periods of interdiction can only bolster the reputation of the Gorbachev administration at home and abroad.

These, and other films that express a decidedly unofficial view of Soviet history and society, have been circulating in all sorts of official western forums lately. Touring Soviet film programmes and cinema personalities have sought to place a fulcrum and lever beneath western public consciousness. And almost surreal events such as the Los Angeles 'Entertainment Summit' between Eastern and Western film executives, together with unprecedented Soviet PR blitzes at festivals, have sought to do the same to the film community.

All this has succeeded in making the batch of Soviet films currently on offer competitive in the international market as hitherto only dreamed of in Moscow. *My Friend Ivan Lapchine* took a Bronze Leopard at the 1986 Locarno Festival. *The Theme* won a Golden Bear at Berlin this year. Soviet films also garnered accolades at Cannes, including the Special Jury Prize for *Repentance*, a Gold Camera for the Georgian director Nana Djordjadze's debut film, *My English Grandfather*, as well as Best Actor and Best Actress for performances in Nikita Mikhalkov's *Oci Chernie* (*Black Eyes*) and Soviet émigré Andrei Konchalovsky's American production *Shy People*. The biggest winner, however, has been Sovexportfilm, the Soviet film export union, which left Cannes with \$2m in contracts for foreign sales. *Perestroika* has been very good for their business.

Alexi Guermann.



However, the business strategy of putting old films into circulation is a one-time shot, as Sovexportfilm well knows. The most important changes are those to be made in the film industry back home. Here proposed reforms are nothing short of revolutionary—if not downright counter-revolutionary. But the introduction of such measures to this sclerotic industry has been slow (it is expected to take three years for them to be fully implemented and written into law), and their impact difficult to assess.

No one is more eager to make that assessment than Mikhail Gorbachev himself, who was in the audience for the tug of war over the reins of power at the Union of Film-makers last May. It was there that Elem Klimov was elected to replace Bondarchuk as the Union's First Secretary. At the same meeting, *Pravda* critic Andrei Plakhov established the Conflict Commission that has been assigned to dust off and review the films the authorities had placed on the shelf. Later last year, the long-time director of Goskino was retired without even the customary words of thanks; his replacement by the younger, less hidebound Alexander Kamshalov made the victory for liberals a clean sweep. Together the Union and Goskino have sketched the blueprint for a film industry that aims to encourage pluralism of ideas and economic self-sufficiency.

A similar programme had actually been attempted on an experimental basis between 1965 and 1976 by a single Mosfilm studio production unit which participated directly in profits made on successful pictures. They also shared losses with Goskino. According to the chief of that unit, Grigori Chukrai, Goskino abandoned the project without adequate review, in spite of (Chukrai suggests because of) its record of 34 productions and numerous successes.

Klimov and Kamshalov have revived that incentive-based programme of self-management. Similar subgroups will be organised in all the country's 39 studios. Unit directors are to be freely elected, and will have the liberty to contract other creative and production personnel. Most significantly, everyone will be hired on a freelance, picture-by-picture basis.

Reform is aimed as well at granting autonomy to the regional studios, even at creating competition between them. The regional Goskino offices will no longer approve individual projects, but will receive instead two- to three-year plans from the studios, which are now required to disclose only their films' subjects in order to avoid duplication.

The regional studios will assume full responsibility for their balance sheets and will seek to recover their costs from distribution alone. Goskino's support will be reduced to orders for pictures which will account for a mere 20 per cent of the production budget. Should the studios become unprofitable, new management will be installed; and bankruptcy awaits those that continue to run in the red.

These structural changes, too, have fired the imagination of western observers. It seems that Klimov and Kamshalov genuinely expect 'pluralism of ideas' to arise from the unfettered play of individual initiative with the forces of commerce. This belief makes the new leaders more than simple reformers of their industry—it makes them free-market thinkers.

When asked if his reforms had opponents, Klimov replied, 'Many'. Where are they? 'Everywhere.'

He proceeds with the knowledge that the Gorbachev administration is behind him; but Klimov also knows Soviet history, where for every action there has been an equal and opposite reaction. Lenin's New Economic Policy provoked Stalin's crackdowns; Khrushchev's thaw precipitated the deep freeze of the Brezhnev years. And the history of Soviet film during these years is fresh in the minds of film-makers from Klimov's generation who lived through it.

The stylistic freshness and inter-

national success of Mikhail Kalatazov's *The Cranes Are Flying* in 1957 seemed to herald a new era for the Soviet cinema. It was at this time that the generation of film-makers which included Klimov, Tarkovsky, Panfilov and Konchalovsky began their careers. Five years later, Chukrai's anti-Stalinist film *Clear Skies* (1961) must have made it seem that the newly liberated Soviet cinema would know no thematic or formal boundaries. Even Klimov's own mordant satire of the Khrushchev administration, *Welcome—No Unauthorised Personnel* (1964), received some distribution.

But soon enough the forces of reaction that were to depose Khrushchev began to assert themselves within the Cultural Ministry. Charges of 'formalism' and 'cosmopolitanism' provided sufficient cause for suppression. In 1966 Yuri Ilyenko's *A Spring for the Thirsty* was shelved for its formal experimentation. Konchalovsky's *Aysa's Happiness* was withdrawn from circulation that year for its 'gloomy picture of village life'. Klimov's *Adventures of a Dentist* and Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* met the same end without any explanation. The cultural administration of the Brezhnev regime left little question as to the new limits of expression in the Soviet cinema. Any lingering doubt was dispelled when the Georgian film-maker Sergei Paradzhanov, whose *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* (1964) is one of the landmarks of Soviet cinema, was

My Friend Ivan Lapchine.



imprisoned after completing *Sayat Nova* (1969) on trumped-up charges that mixed criticism of his work with accusations of homosexuality.

The bleak years that followed, however, offered more than just hamfisted historical epics like Bondarchuk's *They Fought for Their Country* (1975). At their best, the Soviet *chefs d'oeuvre* of the 1970s succeeded in reproducing the Brezhnev era's notion of culture while hinting at something greater that lay beyond it. These films were realist, lyrical dramas that worked within an achieved, official vision of Soviet history. Thematic conflicts were created by the imperfections of individuals, not problems of an inherently social nature: the matinée idol Olga in Mikhalkov's *Slave of Love* (1976) is torn between her bourgeois sentiments and her love for the revolutionary camera operator; the rich Salomine family in Konchalovsky's *Siberiade* (1976-79) is unwilling to part with its upper-class privileges as post-Revolutionary society demands; the provincial girls in *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* (1980) are incapable of realising their somewhat selfish dreams without compromising personal or professional integrity. That such films found assured places in the international market certainly did not hurt their status among Brezhnev's cultural *apparatchiki* either. Aesthetic and political conservatism had succeeded in producing a Soviet 'Cinema of Quality' with a capital 'Q'.

Neither Gorbachev's nor Klimov's reforms have sought directly to censure the forces of conservatism. On the contrary, the latter have benefited as much from *glasnost* as have the liberal elements of Soviet society and film culture. And the ideological and artistic forces that created the Brezhnevian Cinema of Quality are still very much alive.

New freedom of expression has, for example, given rise to an unprecedented wave of Great Russian chauvinism throughout the Soviet media. The most visible and highly organised group to express such sentiments is *Pamyat* or Memory, a grass-roots organisation with purported KGB ties that has strong support in cultural circles. Their nostalgic advocacy for a return to traditional Russian values has deep ideological roots that go back to the notorious pre-revolutionary Union of the Archangel Michael and the Black Hundreds who likewise sought to defend the Russian homeland against conspirators at home and abroad—chiefly 'international Zionists', freemasons and purveyors of western values.

Still, *Pamyat* has won many sympa-

thisers in the ruling circles of the Communist Party by cloaking its dark agenda of intolerance in the mantle of respectability, invoking Gorbachev's anti-alcoholism campaign and the Soviet leader's devotion to Russian history. The group has also succeeded in mobilising intellectual forces around its loaded national ideas. Although they have engaged in a letter-writing campaign to Communist Party journals against the release of *Repentance*, *Pamyat* continues to enjoy support in the Soviet cinema, especially among figures with connections to the Brezhnev establishment.

The tradition of the Brezhnevian Cinema of Quality continues to have its most powerful representation in the person and work of Nikita Mikhalkov. He is the brother of Andrei Konchalovsky, who is undoubtedly the only Soviet citizen living in France but working in L.A., and son of Sergei Mikhalkov, a leading figure in the Writers' Union since the time of Stalin, author of the lyrics to the national anthem and of the progressive gem 'Rock music is like AIDS—both are illnesses without a cure.' As an indication of Nikita Mikhalkov's pull in matters of culture, it is illuminating that it was he Bondarchuk turned to for support when he learned that the Union of Film-makers was engineering his removal.

'There are people who don't have to undergo *perestroika*,' Mikhalkov announced recently. 'I consider myself to be such a person. I don't trust any collective enlightenment when everyone around starts talking about what they used to cover up. The demands of today [seem to be] settling scores and personal feuds.'

Indeed, one of the most recent such settlements took place at this year's Cannes festival between Mikhalkov and Klimov—a foe of all things Brezhnevian, Mikhalkov among them. The latter's Italo-Soviet co-production *Oci Chernie*, a pastiche of Chekhov tales, was in competition. And Klimov was a member of the jury.

Mikhalkov's bitter-sweet crowd-pleaser represented the persistence and further refinement of the style that the director invented in the 1970s. Leading actor Marcello Mastroianni's now patented portrayal of charming dissoluteness was added to an already sure-fire recipe: *Oci Chernie* was an obvious contender for the Grand Prix. An award to Mikhalkov would give the old Cinema of Quality new cachet as the still-reigning representative of Soviet film culture—and as the marketable form that future Soviet commercial co-operation with the West should take.

According to insiders at Cannes, it was only Klimov's personal lobbying among the jury members that kept *Oci Chernie* from winning a Gold Palm. At his behest the jury 'united' instead behind a rather undistinguished French film for top honours and gave Mikhalkov's film the Best Actor award as a consolation prize.

When asked if there is a danger in such tactics of replacing one form of censure by another—even if from a progressive standpoint—Klimov responded obliquely that those who were not re-elected in the Film-makers' Union last year have none the less continued to work, have they not? 'They are not victims. But we will judge them on the basis of their new works, not on their past glory. We don't censure films or film-makers.'

Soviet cultural authorities at every level intended this year's 15th International Moscow Film Festival to surpass even Cannes as the most important event to date in the brief life of the revived Soviet cinema. The festival was to provide the occasion for an on-site inspection of the abolition of 'official culture' and the promised withering away of state interference in the cinema. Moscow disappointed profoundly; instead, it confirmed the suspicion of many that the official drive to recuperate unofficial culture is itself debilitatingly orchestrated from above.

The Soviets had only one entry in competition, a Mosfilm production called *Messenger Boy* that treated an adolescent's apathy and alienation as he

Elem Klimov making *Go and See*.



GORBACHEV'S CINEMA

entered adulthood in an accomplished and humorous but not especially original way. Although this film puts much of the blame for the 'generation gap' on the structure of society, it also took the opportunity to portray western leisure activities—breakdancing, skateboarding, making out—as destabilising forces in Soviet society. In spite of its oblique reference to Afghanistan, *Messenger Boy* was finally a film with a decidedly 'official' character, demonstrating the divided nature of the new official mentality.

The main event for the Soviet cinema at Moscow was clearly not the competition, but the Film Market and the commercial activity that accompanied it. The action and the key players were all here. Announcements of Soviet projects with Columbia Pictures (including two with the numbing titles *Glasnost* and *Chernobyl*), a five-picture deal with Orion, co-productions with Cannon of *Crime and Punishment* and a biography of Rachmaninov, set the tone for business talk here: sadly predictable in subject, grandiose in scale. One rumour circulating was that Panfilov was negotiating with an American partner for a screen version of *Hamlet*.

In fact, most of the culturally significant events in Moscow during those two weeks took place far away from the forum of the festival. The October Kino, a Moscow theatre, showed the first complete retrospective in the USSR of the works of Tarkovsky, including an uncut version of *Andrei Rublev* that was almost an hour longer than previously released versions. This was a public event with a correspondingly enthusiastic and vital dynamic greater than that inspired by anything showcased in the Rossia Festival Hall.

The headquarters of the Film-makers' Union, Dom Kino, served as the place for Soviet film-makers and students to mix with foreign visitors away from the officious supervision of the festival administration. The *ad hoc* programme of official screenings and student films there gave a more accurate and complete picture of the current state of Soviet cinema than all the pabulum press conferences and interminable organised tours of Mosfilm studios put together. Unlike the latter, however, the screenings at Dom Kino transpired with less reliability.

The announcement of the premiere of *The Commissar*, for example, was spread by word of mouth, and was even dismissed by some festival-goers as a rumour. But the fact that the screening was filled to capacity—with many

officials as well as celebrity guests like Vanessa Redgrave in attendance—indicated that it was probably more than simply a spontaneous initiative on the part of the Union.

'Two days ago, I got a phone call,' Askoldov said after the screening. 'They told me my film was going to be shown here at Dom Kino. But who made this decision, when it was made, and in what circumstances, I cannot tell you. No one is more surprised than I.'

When asked those very questions, even Elem Klimov was caught off balance. 'We have been involved in long discussions with the film-maker since last year over what version of the print to screen and where and when to show it,' he responded curtly and without conviction. That the honourable standard-bearer of the Film-makers' Union became another mouthpiece of disinformation at an event already rife with it corroborated the worst prejudices any visitor could have brought to Moscow.

The answers to the questions that Askoldov posed were provided soon enough when *The Commissar* was reprised later in the week at Dom Kino for any prospective foreign buyers who missed the first screening. By that time, it was clear that the Soviet cinema had made its biggest quality score at Cannes. Here in Moscow, however, the order of the day was to cash in the chips.

The metaphor of high-stakes roulette is exact. Change in the cinema in particu-

lar, and the cultural sphere in general, is a risky bid whose prompt outcome could indicate the long-term effects of Soviet domestic policies. The culture industry—film, television, the print media—is less unwieldy than, say, heavy industry, and can thus be transformed more quickly and thoroughly. The media is also the most industrialised and capitalised form of culture and thus the most fertile soil in which to sow the seeds of change using new managerial techniques.

Even in the age of *glasnost* and *demokratizatsia*, the USSR remains a centralised society whose functioning can be more or less altered on command. The images put forth in the film, broadcast and print media correspond precisely to the way that Soviet officialdom wishes the country to be understood at home and abroad. More than anything else, changes in media policy are aimed at modifying the very perception of the Soviet Union by its own people and the rest of the world.

Pravda now regularly devotes a column to the views of western contributors. Investigative reporting has become pervasive in the official press. Literary journals like *Novi Mir* and *Zhizn* are beginning to rehabilitate long-banned works under the leadership of newly appointed editors. Foreign radio broadcasts such as the BBC and Voice of America are no longer jammed. Even Soviet tv is undergoing a rapid, intensive global-village homogenisation: live

Letters from a Dead Man.



and audience call-in shows are now common; satellite links connect Soviet viewers with western audiences and media figures; greater attention to entertainment values has yielded improved computer graphics and attractive television commentators.

That these changes represent a liberalisation of sorts is undeniable. But such changes also represent a strategic use of the media to assist the consolidation of power by the new Soviet leadership. As Marxist thinkers have cogently argued, the media is also the 'consciousness industry'. And the Gorbachev administration's attempt to develop an appealing indigenous media culture is also a piece of public diplomacy aimed at winning the hearts and minds of Soviet audiences long alienated by a dully monolithic cinema, television and press.

Although the domestic release of a film like *Repentance* is brave and risky, it ultimately requires no change in property relations or state control. And progressive as they may seem, organisational changes in the film industry represent nothing so much as an official acknowledgment of the inherently capitalistic nature of feature film production, and the admission that it was an unwillingness to adopt market criteria that brought the development of this sector to a standstill in the first place.

No matter how extensive the Gorbachev administration's push for the liberalisation of the Soviet media, nor how far it pursues its initiatives to increase international co-operation on a commercial basis, control of all public institutions may never be pried from the fist of the Party—as the sixth article of the Soviet constitution guarantees. Ultimately, the media is nothing more than appearances and messages, and the free flow of information is a freedom of a specific and limited sort—whether it rests on a capitalist or a socialist infrastructure.

With such a diversity of forces currently shaping the Soviet cinema, it is tempting to seize on individual personalities in an attempt to account for the irregular contours of the whole. Sergei Bondarchuk has been cast here and elsewhere in the role of an exhausted artist and ideologue clinging to what remains of his fleeing prestige. Nikita Mikhalkov is evoked to indicate the persistent and undeniable appeal of Great Russian culture and its attendant aesthetic and political conservatism. And Elem Klimov lends himself to a role that combines his civic duties as spokesman for a newly liberated Soviet culture

with his aura as the New Socialist man: resolute, long-suffering and humanist.

'None of us wants to make films about tractors,' he has said of himself and his colleagues at the Union, 'but about the problems of those who drive the tractors.' Klimov is also quotable. And photogenic. For those reasons too he has great appeal for observers of the USSR—as well as for the new Soviet political administration. Even the values purveyed in his work, such as the return to common sense (*Farewell to Matorra*) or the development of a moral sensibility in the face of outrage (*Go and See*), coincide neatly with those of the current Soviet leadership. The film-maker shares even their taste for sensationalism (*Agonia*).

There is a similar resonance with Gorbachevian ideology in the work of Klimov's colleagues: Panfilov's redemption of individual conscience in a collective social order or Guermann's celebration of human complexity. These three film-makers, the most talented of their generation who continue to work, have taken the best from the Soviet Cinema of Quality (the mastery of realist dramaturgy and the capacity to render the everyday in heightened, charged terms) but have left behind the institutional character which mars that cinema. They paint an unabashed picture of the shabby and strangely ceremonial life in their country with a palette that mixes equal parts of sentiment and scepticism. They provide something like a sidewalk painter's view of the changing of the guard at the Lenin Mausoleum observed from the steps of St Basil's Cathedral.

But to define the shape of Soviet cinema more precisely, it would be necessary to assess personalities that have barely begun to develop. There is a sharp discontinuity between the poised, measured work of Klimov, Panfilov and Guermann (that bears the stamp of Khrushchev's liberalism) and that of young film-makers who came of age during the stultifying Brezhnev years. Directors like Konstantin Lopushansky (whose deeply spiritual *Letters from a Dead Man* expresses a young generation's collective fear of nuclear holocaust) or Juris Podnieks (creator of the forceful documentary *Is It Easy to Be Young?*) seem to have sprung into existence fully liberated, as well as without any political bearings. Their films display greater self-doubt and recklessness than is conceivable in the work of the older generation, and ultimately greater imagination as well.

If their films are any indication, this younger generation may well lack the

capacity for patience and subterfuge that their elders gained through a lifetime of encounters with unpredictable and often cruel political authority. Unlike them, the new generation boldly rejects the claim, advanced here, that cultural changes are the easiest to make—and also to retract—at their peril.

But of all the personalities in the Soviet cinema, the one that has emerged most recently, after twenty years of forced retirement, is the most problematic. What role can be assigned to Alexander Askoldov? Instead of singing the praises of international co-productions, he reminds anyone who will listen that 'Soviet cinema began with Eisenstein and Dovzhenko, not Klimov and Tarkovsky.' In all his severity and bitterness, he exhorts those who know his story not to transform 'the sad, painful experience of our lives here into demagogic coin'.

'For in spite of what's happened to me personally,' Askoldov explained after the premiere of *The Commissar*, 'I remain a revolutionary. And I wish *perestroika* to convey the spirit of revolution, the same spirit that just now made Americans weep during the Internationale.'

That his film, and the sentiments it expresses, retains that power twenty years after the narrow-minded men then in office sought to suppress it is the greatest tribute to Askoldov's art. But his words, spoken as they were at the 1987 Moscow Film Festival, sounded only curious and a little quaint. ■

The author wishes to thank the Paris distributor Les Films Cosmos for their invaluable assistance.

Alexander Askoldov at Dom Kino.



GORBACHEV'S CINEMA

Independent Access

Julian Petley

● Peacock... has marked out the terrain that will be fought over in the coming years. ●

Love Me Gangster
(After Image for Channel 4);
David Gale (left) and Bob Pugh.



When one considers the amount of time, effort and column inches that have been devoted over the last year to discussion of the increasingly vexed issue of independent access to the BBC and ITV, it is hard to realise that one of the least discussed recommendations of the Peacock Report at the time of its publication was the suggestion that by 1996 the BBC and ITV should take 40 per cent of their programmes from the independent sector.

In retrospect, of course, we can see that the funeral orations read over Peacock were nothing if not premature, the product of wishful thinking by the broadcasters rather than the result of any sustained analysis. That Peacock was by no means a lost cause became apparent last autumn, when the Prime Minister put herself in the chair of a cross-departmental working party (Home Office, DTI, Arts and Libraries, Scottish, Welsh) whose aim was to see how some of Peacock's recommendations — on allowing Channel 4 to sell its own airtime; on auctioning off ITV franchises to the highest bidder; on permitting the independents greater access to BBC and ITV — might best be put into legislative shape. In the confident expectation of a Tory third term, the working party was charged with preparing a Green Paper

for a Broadcasting Bill scheduled for an early reading in the new Parliament. Further evidence of the Government's determination to examine new ways of funding the BBC was furnished by the recent publication of the report on the subject which it commissioned from CSP International.

As Giles Oakley, a BBC TV producer and chair of the London Television Production branch of BETA, observes: 'Peacock was far too quickly dismissed by broadcasters as unworkable, or as not having delivered to the Tories just what they wanted. They thought the problem had gone away. Nothing could be further from the truth. Peacock is going to have a life of its own that goes on and on, and increasingly it is going to be regarded as far-seeing, prescient and unjustly maligned at the time of its release. It has marked out the terrain that will be fought over in the coming years.'

Oakley's comments are borne out by the speed with which the independent access debate has come to dominate the broadcasting agenda. As a response to Peacock's proposal, the 25% Campaign was formed by a number of independent producers in summer 1986 to argue that the BBC and ITV should be taking 25 per cent of their programmes from the independent sector within the next four years. By the end of the year, the campaign found itself in the fortunate position of having its demand taken up by Home Secretary Douglas Hurd and Minister of State at the Home Office David Mellor, and formulated as Government policy. The intervening period has seen the BBC and IBA gradually acceding to the independents' case under a fair degree of Home Office pressure. Though no crude threats have been made in public, it is none the less clear the BBC and IBA both fear that if they do not go a significant way towards meeting the 25 per cent claim, then a quota and a four-year time limit could be imposed upon them by means of legislation.

As things stand at the moment, the IBA in the shape of Lord Thomson and John Whitney have, much to the annoyance of IBCA, agreed that a 25 per cent independent production input into ITV is achievable within five years. Meanwhile the BBC, in the form of its new D.G. Michael Checkland, has said that it will increase its present 100 hours of independent input to 600 hours over the next three years. After three years, the independent productions would be reviewed in terms of cost and quality, and if the review proves satisfactory the BBC would increase the quota, reaching the 25 per cent target after a further three

years. Both the BBC and IBA are at present consulting all affected parties, and in particular discussing terms of trade with the independent producers' main representative bodies, IPPA, AIP and BFTPA.

Beneath the horse-trading over hours, quotas, time scales and the like, however, lie a number of important issues that all too frequently threaten to become submerged beneath a welter of figures and statistics. Perhaps these can best be resolved into a series of questions.

The first, and most crucial. Does independent access threaten the very existence of public service broadcasting as we know it or, on the contrary, does it strengthen it by enabling it to meet new challenges, in particular those posed by cable and satellite? Independent producer, IPPA member and 25% Campaigner John Ellis is in little doubt on this issue: 'We are entering a period of huge change, like it or not. The history of television so far has been one of additions (ITV, BBC2, Channel 4), but now we are going to see something quite different. Just *how* it is going to be different is still up for grabs: it is up to the balance of forces which prevail at the time the important decisions are taken. But British television as it stands is in no shape to stand up to anything. The real danger is that if we do nothing there will be wholesale destruction of the present system by the privatisers, those with no respect for indigenous traditions and cultural diversity, those who simply want to maximise audiences at all cost. The ideology of public service broadcasting is exhausted and has been much abused: there has been too much that has been corrupt and self-serving marching under that banner for it to be workable any more. Perhaps we should talk instead of socially responsible broadcasting. What we are in favour of is not *de*-regulation but, as Mark Fisher puts it, *re*-regulation.'

This last point is expanded upon by fellow independent producer, IPPA member and 25% Campaigner John Wyver: 'If you look at the history and development of Channel 4, there has been a rigorous debate about what *kind* of television it should be producing, and that has been enshrined in regulation and legislation. For instance, there is a strict quota on foreign imports and a clearcut commitment to minority audiences. And the independent debate must be equally rigorous, so that any legislation, and likewise the terms of trade and individual contracts, specify quite unambiguously what the term "independent" really means. Similarly,



we must talk about what *sort* of television we are trying to achieve. We want to develop the notion of public service broadcasting and make it work in a changing broadcasting ecology. Otherwise the present system is simply going to implode. Whether we like it or not, there is going to be change: the new channels will mean that audiences are going to break up and fragment, there will be more outlets for advertising and more pressure on the sources of funding. The BBC licence fee will continue to shrink in real terms, but they will have much more flexibility with which to respond to those changes if there is a significant level of independent production integrated into them.'

The problem with these arguments, however, is that they fly in the face of the Government's *de*-regulatory impulses. This point is forcefully put by Roy Lockett, ACTT deputy general secretary: 'You have to look at the question of independent access in its wider political context. You can't see it just in the independents' own rather narrow terms. Everything that the Government has done and is doing indicates that one way or another they want a deregulated broadcasting system, and in this context once you begin to introduce major elements of independent production into the BBC and ITV you do begin effectively to deregulate them and to lay the basis for the system to be changed. But the independents just seem to see ITV/BBC as one box, and the independent sector as another, and all they appear to think they are trying to do is take a block of hours out of one box and put it into the other. They see that there will be some contraction in one box, and some expansion in the other, but otherwise they think things will stay the same. But under this government they won't. Of course, the whole question of independent access *would* look different under a

State of the Art
(Illuminations for Channel 4):
Filming paintings by the German artist
Anselm Kiefer. Photo: Geoff Dunlop.

government which did not regard regulation as anathema—then you *could* adjust and control the system, enrich its plurality and diversity, improve its resources and so on. But all the Tories want is the destruction of the public service broadcasting system. The paradox, of course, is that without this system the independents would not exist. They don't exist in a free market—they exist because Channel 4 is a protected zone which earmarked funds to the independent sector on a very specific remit. They are fundamentally the product of a highly regulated system—and dependent on it.'

But what of the argument that the independents could help to protect the public service broadcasting ethos, by enabling the BBC/ITV to produce good programmes more cheaply and thus remain competitive in a changing market situation? Certainly, even before the 25% Campaign began, there was a feeling that the independents might be able to make a useful contribution in this area, at least to the BBC. For example, Peat Marwick Mitchell's 1985 'Value For Money' review of the BBC compared the cost of producing Channel 4's *Brookside* and the BBC's own *EastEnders*, then still at the planning stage. It concluded: 'The Corporation should pursue comparisons with Channel 4 in order to establish whether the Corporation would benefit from changes in the mix of its programme sources, for example by increasing the use of independent producers.' It also suggested 'more flexibility' in output in order 'to overcome the rigidity which can follow from the high proportion of fixed staff and plant costs.'

In consequence, a BBC committee led by the then Director of Television Resources Michael Checkland invited a number of independent producers to participate in a confidential cost-swapping exercise between comparable categories of programmes. According to one of the participants, David Graham of Diverse Productions, the committee 'reached the broad consensus that the Channel 4 independents were paying much higher wages than the BBC, and that there are many programmes that the BBC can produce more cheaply because of its low wages and large amount of depreciated capital assets like studios, camera equipment and so on. However, in the case of "in-puts"—the cost of services to programmes—these were much cheaper in the independent sector than in the BBC.'

At the same time, another committee inside the BBC, this time led by the Director of Finance Geoff Buck, was

Independent Access

● It does not matter to minorities if the majority want to watch lumpen television so long as their service is still there. ●

Turning Japanese
(Firefret for Channel 4):
Mrs Thatcher opens Nissan plant.
Photo: Sunderland Echo.

examining how budgets could be trimmed in the light of the Government's decision to limit the increased licence fee to £58. It recommended that there should be major cuts in the Corporation's central support services and that by 1988 the BBC should be aiming to take 150 hours a year of programming from the independent sector.

There was, then, a feeling that the independents could do it cheaper, and for a while it became fashionable for independent producers to bandy about impressive-sounding financial comparisons between themselves and what Peacock had termed 'the comfortable duopoly'. But it soon became clear that like was not really being compared with like and, bizarre though it may seem, that no one in any case knows what BBC and ITV programmes *really cost*.

At the moment, though this may change, BBC budgeting is based on above and below the line costs. The former are the actual cash costs on a programme budget, involving purchase of film stock, hire of costumes, payment of freelancers and the like. However, the cash column of the budget is tiny compared to the below the line costs, which are more a matter of Monopoly money. Here certain sums are notionally set aside on the internal costing system, and the exercise really has more to do with the allocation of manpower and machinery in terms of hours of use than with any form of money actually changing hands. As for the ITV companies, their internal budgeting may indeed be on a cash basis, but it is certainly not a full-cost basis, since production costs are cloaked in all sorts

of ingenious write-off ploys so that profits do not appear to be too high. If the real programme costs became known, the Government might consider switching the Treasury levy from profits to turnover.

If the independents of the 25% Campaign variety prove unable to produce good programmes more cheaply than BBC/ITV, the worry is that they may have opened the door to a considerably larger and less public service conscious form of 'independent' of the Murdoch/Maxwell/Berlusconi variety, which will eventually gobble up both them and the entire public service broadcasting system. As Giles Oakley puts it: 'The problem is that a plethora of small independent companies with good intentions can never build up to the kind of scale that would enable them to mount a really secure, long-term provision of programming. The single strands and one-offs which they can provide won't make much impact in the international market that will develop with cable and satellite and which requires large-scale production houses. In this situation, the little fish will be eaten by the big ones and Murdoch and his ilk will have found their way inside the present broadcasting system.'

A similar point was made by Thames Television's Director of Programmes David Elstein, when he argued in the early days of the 25% Campaign that independents of the Channel 4 variety could never survive in a truly 'free' market: 'If you want to bring in independent production, you have to subsidise it. What independents cannot do is compete with the Lorimers and New Worlds, who put on the market for \$35,000 an hour material which costs \$1m to make.' Nor is it easy for original (and therefore relatively expensive) independent production to compete with cheap, wall-to-wall back catalogues and old film libraries, which is what the likes of Murdoch's Sky Channel beams down to its consumers. On the other hand, it might be argued that such programming is unlikely to attract large audiences in countries such as the UK where attractive alternatives exist.

To quote Paul Styles of IPPA: 'Economically there is a move to these large oligopoly operations, but even in them you can see the seeds of their own destruction. It's noticeable that Berlusconi is moving in to being a production house rather than purely a channel, and even the most undemanding soul will not take a 24-hour diet of recycled pap and 30-year-old black and white American reruns. Another example is



MTV in the States—which was music video clips strung together. It has gone through a massive audience turn-off, which has led them to reorganise into a proper broadcast channel, simply because the public actually does have some say in the matter.' It might also be pointed out in this context that Murdoch's Sky Channel is having to put in specific language services in certain countries to command the advertising it needs.

A further twist was added to the cost argument earlier this year by the publication of a report by National Economic Research Associates (who, ironically, also carried out research for Peacock). In brief, the report argued that the 25 per cent over five years plan would halve the profits of the biggest ITCA companies and cut the profits of the smaller regional franchise-holders by up to two-thirds. If the target were rigidly enforced it would have the effect of greatly increasing production costs, since smaller amounts of in-house production would still carry significant overhead and administrative costs. If the 25 per cent target applied to both BBC and ITV, the value of independent production would need to rise from the current annual level of £85m to between £300m and £350m. Such an increase, the report argues, would be accompanied by a reduction in programme quality and increased costs/reduced efficiency in the independent sector, and by job losses within the existing broadcasting institutions.

Again, to realise the force of this argument, it is necessary to envisage the system not as it is now but as it will exist in ten years time, when forced to compete with the new cable and satellite systems run by what Sir Denis Forman in his Richard Dimbleby Lecture called the 'media mercenaries'. As he put it: 'When we see the wares of the international brigade on our sets we should understand one thing. Their television is different from our television: it is aimed at a mass market all of the time, and good luck to them. But it may pose a threat to British television's service to minorities. In Australia and the USA we find our kind of television in a poor state of health. There, public television is short of funds, short of government support and short of viewers. This is bound to happen if you confront a schedule made up of minority programmes with lumpen television, wall-to-wall quizzes, game shows, *Dynasty* and *The Colbys*. But it does not matter to minorities if the majority want to watch lumpen television so long as their service is still there. So what will happen in



Visions: Cinema in China
(Large Door for Channel 4):
Gong Xue. Photo: Ron Orders.

this country when the viewing figures drop, as drop they will?'

It is worth pointing out here that even Peacock said that it 'would not wish the independent producer industry to come to be dominated or substantially influenced by large private sector empires' and recommended stringent fair-trading legislation for television production companies. However, as ACTT has pointed out, even if the criteria for qualifying as a genuine independent company were to include being EEC-based and a non-broadcaster, this would 'exclude ITV subsidiaries such as Euston Films but could include major corporations such as Virgin, Cannon and Berlusconi's European-based operations.'

The answer to Sir Denis' question ultimately lies outside the broadcasting system and in the political one. In other words, it is a question of political will. So let us turn to the matter of programme content and ask whether independent access will mean better television (better, that is, in public service broadcasting terms). As Steve Pinhay, the new head of AIP, says: 'Depending on your point of view, independent access signals either the beginnings of greater consumer choice on television or death by deregulation. But the big question is how independent access will be translated into programming. Rather than standing on the sidelines attacking the Tory government for supporting the independents' case and defending the BBC/ITV as the only true custodians of public service broadcasting, there should be a concerted effort to ensure that independent access means an extension of radical programming as well as securing the livelihood of independent producers. In other words, there should be a major campaign to put programme content on the agenda as well as questions of hours and terms.'

Judging by the independents' record on Channel 4, the prospects for more dynamic and imaginative programming on BBC/ITV might at first sight look quite promising. Giles Oakley, however, disents: 'I accept many of the independents' claims that the existing BBC/ITV

system is too bureaucratic, too cautious, and hasn't encouraged enough diversity of output and experiment in both form and technical development. But if you look at Channel 4 as an example of what the independents have achieved, two things strike me forcibly. First, many of the independents themselves are people who have come out of the BBC and ITV rather than the more radical independent film movement. And secondly, Channel 4's vaunted diversity was much more in evidence during its first years. I just do not see that in the summer of 1987 there is any greater diversity of viewpoint, formal experiment or excellence of production on Channel 4 than on BBC. And where are the feminist programmes, the gay programmes, the Marxist programmes, the investigations of new areas of intellectual growth (apart from *The New Enlightenment*), the equivalents of *The Singing Detective* and *Edge of Darkness*, and so on?'

Part of Oakley's argument finds an unexpected ally in John Ellis, who points out: 'The danger will be that the kind of independent programmes commissioned by the BBC will be taken from companies which have been formed by recent ex-BBC employees. The BBC in its usual imperious fashion will want to deal with people who know its ways already. Diversity has to start at the point of commissioning: those who have the power of the purse and the power to schedule play a crucial role here, and it won't be easy to change that. Truly independent access will have happened only when people who have worked only for Channel 4 or only on non-broadcast material actually get proper access to the BBC. So the editorial argument is not yet won at all.'

Finally, what of the effect of independent access on jobs within the BBC/ITV system? The worst-case scenario would be that 25 per cent access would entail 25 per cent redundancy. This seems a little too simple. An alternative approach, suggested by research carried out by ACTT, would be to base the calculation on staff costs. According to Michael Checkland, staff costs amount to 60 per cent of broadcasting organisation's total costs: 25 per cent of 60 per cent would thus give a potential redundancy rate of 15 per cent. Basing the calculations solely on the wages bill, and noting that in 1981 ITCA's figures showed the wage bill as representing 28 per cent of total costs, then 25 per cent of 28 per cent would give a potential redundancy rate of 7 per cent. Both the BBC and ITCA companies have indicated that any redundancies brought about by

Independent Access

● What is an independent, and 25 per cent of what? ●

independent access would be met by 'natural wastage'.

Whatever the final outcome in terms of regular, full-time employment in the broadcasting industry, it is hard to avoid the thought that one impulse behind the Tories' support for the 25% Campaign is union bashing. Not for nothing have ACTT and BETA been excluded from all negotiations with the Home Office. After all, did not Peacock state that 'requirements for in-house production are at the root of union restrictive practices' and, further, that 'if ITV programme-makers were separate entities from ITV contractors, they could less readily be blackmailed by the threat to black channels out'? And what of the current campaign being waged in the Tory press to persuade us that trade unionists in television are grossly overpaid? Thus ludicrous stories of £92,000 overtime claims, 'union tricks that send pay packets sky high... crews eat like kings' (the *News of the World*), or the *Mail on Sunday* headline 'Outsiders to Break Union Grip at BBC and ITV' over a story which argued that the aim of independent access is 'to curb the power of militant technicians' unions at the BBC and in ITV.'

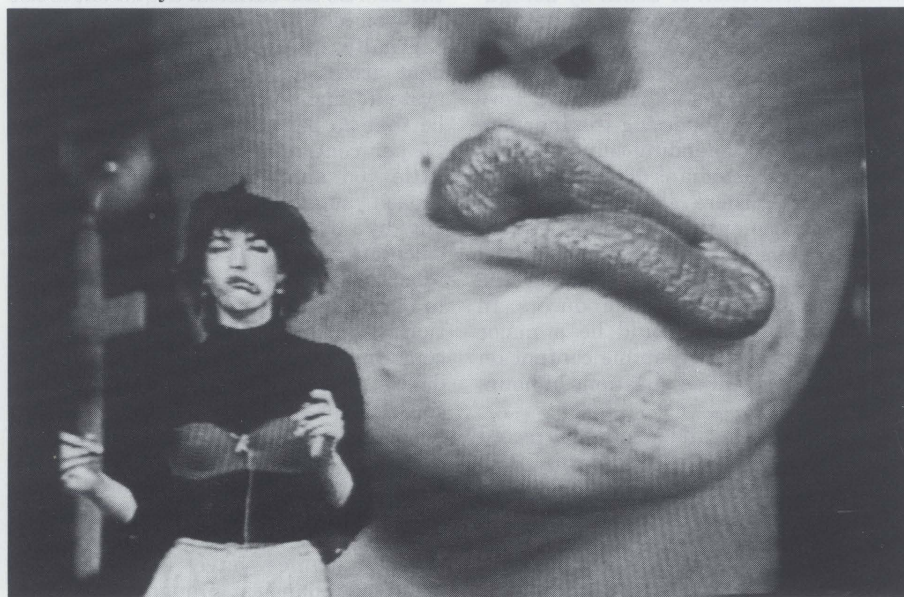
It is really no wonder, then, that the unions feel somewhat sore on this issue. The deliberate exclusion of ACTT in particular from the negotiations seems all the more regrettable given the union's record of co-operation with the independent sector and its willingness to take on board the various issues raised above, not least the all-important cultural argument. ACTT pioneered the codes of practice with the BFI and Regional Arts Associations and played a key role in

bringing the Film and Video Workshops into being; they were also the first union to recognise IPPA and to enter into an agreement with them.

Roy Lockett argues: 'We are not opposed in principle to the access of independent companies to ITV, but we do think that the notion of a quota is quite arbitrary and we do seek a range of specific guarantees to protect members permanently employed in ITV. There are a number of definitional problems to be addressed and sorted out; for example, what is an independent, and 25 per cent of what? Will access material provide 25 per cent of all screen time, including foreign quota, or solely of ITV productions, which comprise about 70 per cent of total output? Would a quota be applied within each programme area? And would any target figure be applied across total national output or applied rigidly to each and every ITV company? If so, enormous problems would arise at smaller companies like Border, Grampian, Ulster and TSW. To maintain the regional base of public service broadcasting it is important that independents are commissioned from regional companies, and not just from London where at present about 90 per cent of the independents are based. What we want to ensure overall is that if there is independent access to ITV, we have the same kind of arrangements there as we have at Channel 4, which have proved themselves very well. And we have a structure, a series of criteria, against which we are perfectly prepared to examine and assess the way in which independent access to the system is best achieved.'

This article has attempted to raise some of the issues underlying the independent access debate rather than to draw any hard and fast conclusions and provide neat answers. One thing that can be said with certainty, however, is that no change is no option. The Government is determined to introduce a degree of deregulation into broadcasting, and the multinational media conglomerates are circling British television like vultures. If the public service broadcasting system is to survive, both these challenges must be faced. In such circumstances, the only available option for those who care is to try to work out a common strategy, to agree on what forms of re-regulation are both desirable and possible and to attempt to influence government thinking in that direction. If all this fails, the film and newspaper industries offer us a dire glimpse of what the future may hold for British broadcasting. ■

Chat Rap
(Goldsmiths' College for Channel 4):
Video directed by John Scarlett-Davis.



ARIA

DIRECTED BY

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BRUCE BERESFORD
BILL BRYDEN
JEAN-LUC GODARD
DEREK JARMAN
FRANC RODDAM
NICOLAS ROEG
KEN RUSSELL
CHARLES STURRIDGE
JULIEN TEMPLE

PRODUCED BY DON BOYD

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DIRECTED BY DEREK JARMAN

PRODUCED BY JAMES MACKAY AND DON BOYD
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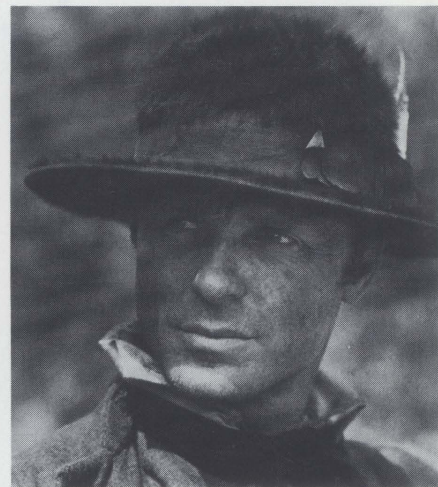
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Left: Alex Cox at work on *Walker*. Photograph: Pyke.

Below: Ed Harris as William Walker.

Right: Walker and his drummerboy (Richard Edson) lead the ragged army of the 'Immortals' into town.



GRAHAM FULLER visits the Nicaraguan location of Alex Cox's new film

WALKER

On the first Saturday afternoon in May, the Nicaraguan location of *Walker*—Alex Cox's absurdist costume epic about the Tennessee filibuster William Walker (played by Ed Harris) who seized the country by force in 1855—became a fully fledged media circus. Several American TV crews descended on a sparse patch of woodland outside the sleepy town of San Juan del Sur on the Pacific coast, some twenty miles from the Costa Rican border, to catch the arrival on the set of the female lead, Marlee Matlin. One of these crews had also intended to cover the Atlanta-style burning of the film's plywood opera house in Granada that week, but had been diverted north to Matagalpa to report on the funeral of the young Oregon *brigadista* Benjamin Linder, who had been shot by the Contras while working on a rural electrification project in Jinotega.

Six weeks into its 7½-week schedule, Cox's own crew had already garnered considerable press and TV attention, since the \$5 million film is being made specifically as a protest against the Reagan administration's proxy war on Nicaragua's democratically elected Sandinista government. By way of such vituperative metaphorical allusions as 'Walker was an American cutthroat, like an Oliver North-type pirate,' Cox was letting everyone know the exact tenor of the political parable he and his committed collaborators were filming.

He was also proving good copy, but

it was Matlin who galvanised the *paparazzi*. Although her impassioned performance in *Children of a Lesser God* and her own hearing problem won her the role of Walker's deaf fiancée Ellen Martin, the appearance of the Oscar-winning actress in Nicaragua—a pale, thin, schoolgirl figure draped in the official red-and-black *Walker* T-shirt and hiding behind large sunglasses—undoubtedly added an aura of mainstream solidarity to the controversial project. Shyly greeting some of the actors playing the grimy, bedraggled freebooters in Walker's army of 'Immortals' (some had waited a long time to meet their co-star), she expressed her eagerness to start work next day—and impatiently waved away the predatory TV cameras.

So did Cox, mindful that the film was running a week late. Three days earlier, its vast entourage had left the dust and ashes in Granada's magnificent Spanish colonial plaza—commandeered for the film by the Nicaraguan film institute Incine, and transformed into a battleground for much of the shoot—for the unblemished sands of San Juan del Sur, six leagues from where Walker, his 55 Immortals and 110 natives originally invaded in 1855. Here Cox filmed the beaching of the disgruntled army, heedless of Walker's mission but hungry for women and loot; the flamboyant approach of its support column led by a Prussian officer mounted on an ox; and

Walker's execution by firing squad. This last scene, which doesn't appear in Rudy Wurlitzer's *Walker* script, was shot with a Soviet supply tanker (moored a mile out to sea) edging its way into the picture, and watched by a couple of hundred locals in an atmosphere of weird anachronistic resonance.

In a clearing in the woods, Cox ordered the next set-up: a meeting between the English artist who became the chronicler of Walker's adventures, C. W. Doubleday (Ed Tudor Pole), and the ragged army marching inland towards its first battle. Cinematographer Dave Bridges, favouring static frames with plenty of movement within them, had positioned his camera slightly behind the twenty-foot Mayan idol that Doubleday, seated on a tree trunk beside his pot of tea, is sketching before he's interrupted. As the weary Immortals tramp forward and out of shot, the Chinese-American mercenary Lu I (David Chung) collects a rainbow-plumed parrot from a bush and Walker, dressed in messianic black, locks gazes with the monolith. His lieutenants, the ill-tempered cowboys Crocker (Keith Szarabajka) and Anderson (Bruce Wright), tell Doubleday they're advancing on Rivas. 'Really. What on earth for?' comes the reply. 'We're liberating the country for Democracy,' says Anderson. 'What an odd thing to do. I suppose you're Americans?' Crocker: 'Used to be. We're Nicaraguans now.'



As written by Wurlitzer and filmed by Cox, this sardonic vision of cyclical history is a central theme in *Walker*, one evinced by a series of anachronisms which punctuate the main action. Bivouaced in the jungle overnight, the Immortals witness a ghostly procession of six conquistadors, their imperial predecessors. Marching on the following day, one of the soldiers whips out a Nikon to photograph a crater lake, while others stumble across the twisted wreckage of a crashed aeroplane. In the script at least, the latter image promises the hallucinatory beauty of such omens of disaster as the wrecked boat and helicopter, each suspended in a tree, in, respectively, *Aguirre*, *Wrath of God* and *Apocalypse Now*. Other technological timeslips in *Walker* hint at the futility of contemporary superpower depredations in the Third World.

'If the anachronisms don't work, we'll know right away,' says Wurlitzer, author of the novel *Slow Fade*, Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, Monte Hellman's *Two Lane Blacktop*, and recently the writer/co-director (with Robert Frank) of the road movie *Candy Mountain*. 'But that's what decided me to do the script. When Alex and I wrote the outline, we took the big decision to play with time, to see history returning, so that the reality of the film keeps shifting. As soon as we introduced the anachronisms, that opened the door for humour, irony and surrealism. It was

always important for this film to be funny—as well as serious and moving, with a progression into madness and horror.

'One didn't want the film to be pretentious and have a heavy message like *Latino* [also shot in Nicaragua]. *Walker* has to exist on a different level altogether, both as a metaphor and as popular entertainment. We're dealing very specifically with an American metaphor, but because we learned our colonialism from the Europeans the film confronts a Western dilemma. In that sense, the eclectic nature of the Immortals—all Europe is shown in the mayonnaise of characters—is very important.'

Stylistically, too, the film has a diversity of influences. 'Some people think it's going to be too violent,' adds Wurlitzer. 'It isn't if you regard it as a comic opera—the lineage of *Walker* is Leone, Peckinpah, Kurosawa and Buñuel.' Accordingly, Cox has opted for poetic, slow-motion displays of bloodshed in his battle scenes, in the manner of his favourite film, *The Wild Bunch*. To a certain extent, it's the same tactic employed by Oliver Stone in *Salvador* and *Platoon*: get the carnage-addicted, *Rambo*-loving American audiences in and teach them something about the nature of us interventionism.

'The style of the film dictated itself,' remarks Dave Bridges. 'It's difficult to say what it is—it's certainly not natural-

istic. It's supposed to be believable, but at the same time there's something slightly offbeat about it. A lot of the angles we've chosen are quite strange. I don't like using zooms often, but we were persuaded by *The Wild Bunch* that a slow-motion zoom can be really effective, especially when you isolate it by using less sound or music—that can turn into something very bizarre. We have also been influenced by etchings from the period that show Walker surrounded by lots of people, and we have gone for huge landscape close-ups of Walker's rigid face set in the middle of a maelstrom—because that's what the film is about.'

Bridges was squatting on the quay of production designer Bruno Rubeo's authentic re-creation of the 1850s San Francisco waterfront which, together with a seaworthy model (fashioned from a rotting hulk) of Walker's ship the *Vesta*, he and his team of set decorators and carpenters had built at Asese, on the shore of Lake Nicaragua outside Granada. Here, too, is the New Orleans townhouse in which Ellen Martin dies of cholera early in the film. Rubeo began work just four weeks before the production started, when it was decided by executive producer Ed Pressman—who is financing the film with Universal—that with Incine's logistical help and provision of building materials and other essential supplies (made necessary by the US economic embargo), it would

save about \$1¼ million to shoot the film entirely in Nicaragua, instead of half in Mexico as originally intended.

'It has to be shot here or it isn't worth doing,' affirms Cox. 'I think the Nicaraguans hope the film will change the minds of the North American public, but they also see it as a thing that's going to reflect well upon them—that a Hollywood-style movie, with hundreds of extras and beautiful period locations, can be made in a very poor country that's in the middle of a war.'

Cox first read about Walker in a two-line reference in the left-wing American magazine *Mother Jones*; he was further inspired on a political tour of Nicaragua in 1984 when he saw an inscription on Granada's cathedral stating that Walker had burned it down in 1855. A qualified doctor, lawyer and inflammatory newspaper editor born in Nashville in 1824, the Walker who invaded Nicaragua was an insane product of the doctrine of manifest destiny preaching the USA's inviolable right to annex and rule the rest of the western hemisphere. He had already fought an abortive campaign to colonise Lower California and Sonora in 1853, before his victories at Rivas and Granada enabled him, in 1856, to proclaim himself president of a 'democracy', which he swiftly tyrannised into a model slave state. Ousted in battle in 1857, he unsuccessfully invaded Nicaragua twice more and tried to raise a revolution in Honduras, where he was arrested by the British and shot in September 1860.

Released in Britain in May, Alex Cox's punk spaghetti Western *Straight to Hell* did nothing to enhance his reputation as a maverick or 'cult' director. Indulgent and muddled—where his first two films, *Repo Man* and *Sid and Nancy*, were visually dynamic and possessed of mordant humour and dark energies—its excuse was that it was made for \$1 million, in three weeks, with a script written in three days, and as a consolation when Cox couldn't raise enough money for a filmed concert tour of Nicaragua by Joe Strummer (cast in *Walker* as the Immortals' dishwasher) and The Pogues. As a technical exercise, at least, *Straight to Hell* has now been redeemed by its makers as a 'dry run' for *Walker*, in which Cox is finally fulfilling his ambitions for a spectacular, politically conscious Nicaraguan film.

Ed Pressman, who had nearly bailed out *Sid and Nancy* at one stage, agreed to back *Walker* when Eric Fellner, producer of Cox's last two pictures, dropped out. His one visit to Nicaragua was to extricate Cox from his row with the completion bond company which was threatening to dump the production halfway through—allegedly at the behest of the CIA, although Cox denies such rumours.

'Ed Harris radiates a very attractive sort of American quality,' says Cox of his leading actor, 'a grey-eyed passionate intensity—the type of guy who mythologises women and murders men. I'm turned on by Walker in this film,

whereas before I thought of him as a repulsive thing. Now that I'm shouting for him, I constantly have to remind myself that he's evil. He is the most charismatic man you could ever meet, but he serves only the forces of destruction and darkness.'

Cox's satanic purview of US imperialism through the ages—he cites Walker's as 'number one or two in a list of 16 invasions of Nicaragua'—may shock, tease or amuse its eventual audiences into at least contemplating the morality of Congress' funding of the Contras, although there's an implicit risk that some viewers might take Walker's brutal methods to their bosom. Editor David Martin, an ex-BBC man who remained with Cox in Nicaragua to cut *Walker* even as Colonel North testified in the Iran-Contra Hearings, offered a final rational perspective on the film's importance.

'If you ask a lot of the production crew—particularly the actors—who were apprehensive about coming here, even the most conservative will admit that they are horrified at the lies that are told about Nicaragua. A camaraderie has built out of that and a sense that we are making an allegory that has found its place in time and history. But we're really only here because of Alex Cox, and it makes you think, "Why am I following this crazy guy?" It's difficult to define, but he has amazing enthusiasm and just gets out there and gets things done.'



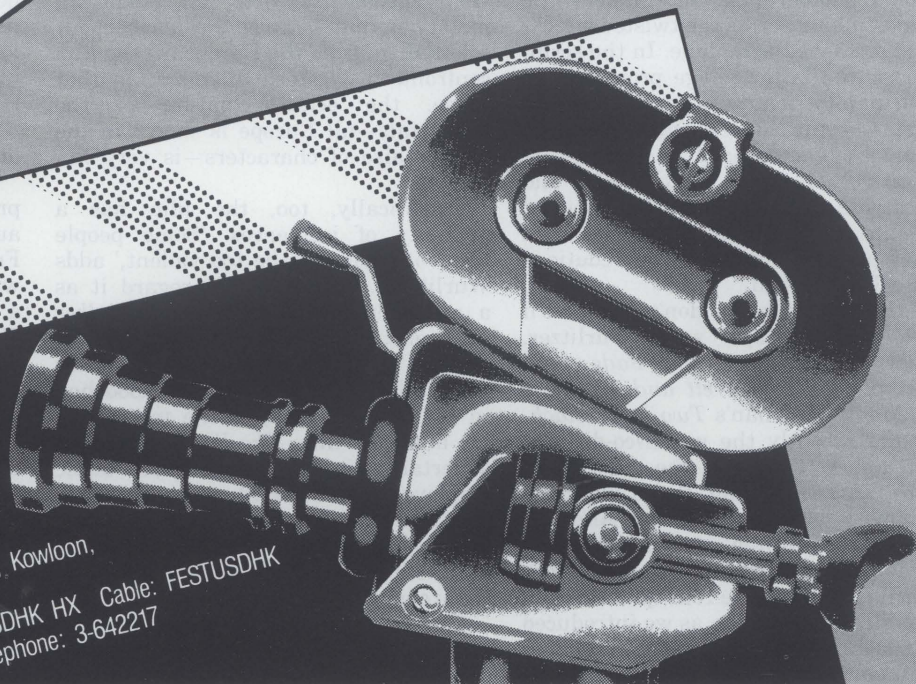
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Travels with Mrs Kawakita

A film festival is not a festival if Mrs Kawakita is not there. In the great travelling circus which is festival society, moving in mass from Berlin to Cannes to Moscow to Venice to New York to Bombay and back to Berlin to start the whole circuit again, there is no better known or better loved figure. She is a small, exquisite Japanese lady, invariably dressed in purply-mauve kimono, plain or striped, and obi to match. Through all the irritations and chaos that are endemic to festivals, the charm, good humour and elegance of 'K' never desert her. Sometimes one suspects she possesses a benign witchcraft to deal with the ordinary hazards of life. At the end of a day trudging through the dust of Delhi or snow in Chicago, when everyone else is dirty or frozen and certainly irritable, Mrs Kawakita is as fresh and serene as ever, and the white socks that peep out beneath her kimono are as Persil-white as they were that morning.

She and her husband, Nagamasa Kawakita, who died in 1981, first went to the Venice festival half a century ago; and there are now very few people who remember a time before they were on the scene. During all those years they were ambassadors at large for Japanese cinema, and awareness of Japanese film in the West has been to a very great degree due to their personal efforts. Mrs Kawakita's contribution to the national culture has been recognised by the Japanese Government with the award of the Purple Ribbon Medal in 1974 and the still more prestigious Third Order of the Sacred Treasure in 1980. Among her other honours are Cavaliere dell'Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana (1978) and Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1984). At the 1985 Moscow festival the Film-makers' Association of the USSR gave her a special award.

The road to these honours has often been bumpy. Kashiko Kawakita was born into a comfortably-off Yokohama family. As a schoolgirl she discovered the cinema. 'My uncle or some friend would take me. I was a great fan of the Pearl White serials. You know they always ended at a moment of terrible



suspense. I could never resist going back the next week to see what happened.' This was still in the period when the *benshi* provided a live commentary to the films. 'In Yokohama we had good *benshi* and good orchestras for the silent films. The orchestras mostly played foreign music—Offenbach and the like.' Her favourite Japanese stars were Tanaka Kinuyo ('the actress of my dreams') and Sumiko Kurishima of the Shochiku Company, two of Japan's earliest female actresses. (In 1953, after thirty years as an actress, Tanaka Kinuyo became Japan's first woman director. Sumiko Kurishima was a major star in the 1920s and 30s; and having made her first screen appearance in 1909 at the age of six, she is still living today.)

Later *Nanook of the North* made a very great impression on her. 'Of course I knew nothing about Flaherty. It was just a film. But it made me see that the film had limitless possibilities to show the world and people. I already knew then that I would like to work with film.' Her working life was precipitated as a result of the disaster of the Tokyo Earthquake of 1923. Along with 64 per cent of the city's population, Kashiko's family were rendered homeless, and financially ruined. As soon as she was able, she had to work to help support her mother and two sisters. So, after graduation from Ferris Seminary in Yokohama, she took a secretarial course at the YWCA. In January 1929 she took her first and, as it proved, fateful job as a secretary at the Towa Company.

Towa Shoji Goshi Kaisha had been established a year before by Nagamasa Kawakita. Kawakita's own life had seen its share of tragedy. His father was a captain from the Military Academy, and was wounded in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. He returned home as a staff officer and was subsequently invited to Peking to advise on training the Chinese army—at this period the Chinese were eager to learn Japanese-style military strategy. Like his son in later years, the elder Kawakita was very attracted to the Chinese, and was so enthusiastic in imparting his expertise that he aroused the suspicions of more nationalistic fellow officers, who arranged his murder. The crime aroused violent protest and remains an historic diplomatic incident.

Young Kawakita began his studies at Peking University; but the hostility provoked by Japan's designs on China during and after the First World War made life there untenable for a Japanese student. A close friend, a German Baron, advised him to study in Europe, where he would improve his command of languages. Moving to Germany, he studied for two years at the University of Lingen, near the Dutch border.

Up to this time he had had no interest in films. His conversion came with *Siegfried*. He was impressed not just by Lang's artistry, but by the effect the film had on the morale of a defeated Germany. From the start Kawakita was impressed by the socio-political importance of the media. 'He had idealism. He was artistic. He had always dreamed of

being a writer; but he had to face the reality that he must work to support his family.'

Returning to Japan in 1928, he set up a distribution company, Towa, with the assistance of his friend the German Baron and the aim of importing foreign films of artistic quality. The earliest releases, inevitably, were German—*Asphalt*, *Metropolis*, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, *Heimkehr*, *Ungarische Rhapsodie*, *Das weisse Stadion*, *Melodie des Herzens*, *Die letzte Kompagnie*, *The Blue Angel*, *Die Drei von der Tankstelle*.

The company needed a new secretary and Kashiko applied. 'I had done my course in stenography, but I had no experience. I went along to the Towa office on a recommendation. As it happened, my future husband was not there that day—he had gone to Kyoto to talk to Mizoguchi about the possibility of selling his films in Europe. So I was interviewed and engaged by his German friend. There were only three or four of us in the office and we worked every day from early morning till late at night. I am reminded of those times when I see my daughter Kazuko working in just the same way in the distribution company which she now runs with her husband, Shibata. History repeats itself'

In 1932 the Kawakitas made their first buying trip together to Europe: they were to make five such trips between 1932 and 1938. In the 30s it was no light undertaking: they travelled across the entire Soviet Union by the Trans-Siberian Railway, a journey which took two weeks. The trains had no restaurants: travellers had to carry enough food for the journey or rely on bread, cheese and sausages bought at stops en route.

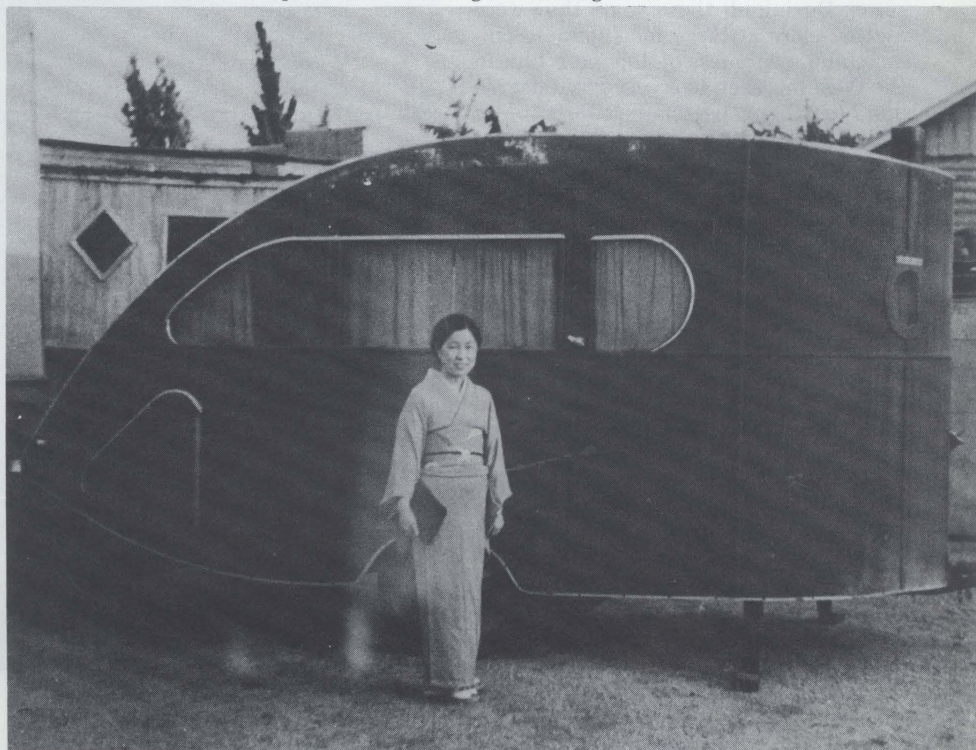
In Europe Mrs Kawakita did most of the viewing. Her husband relied on 'a woman's tastes', since women made up a large part of the intelligentsia on whom they relied for their audience. His own role was to approve and negotiate for the

films she recommended. One of the discoveries of their first trip was *Mädchen in Uniform*. 'I was certain it could be a big success if it was properly handled, so I persuaded him to take it. We met Carl Froelich, and later Dorothea Wieck and Hertha Thiele who were the stars of the film.' Time has vindicated their taste on these buying trips: practically every title in the Towa catalogue of the 30s remains in any repertory of film classics.

With the change of political climate after 1933, their enthusiasm for Germany waned, and they began to look elsewhere for films. In Vienna they discovered Willi Forst, who was 'highly appreciated' in Japan and gave them a major success with *Maskerade*. In London they established a connection with British and Colonial Films and brought back *Man of Aran*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Evergreen* and *Chu-Chin-Chow*. From France they imported Marc Allégret's *Lac aux Dames*, the films of Duvivier, and above all the early Clair musicals. Towa retained a virtual monopoly of film importation: while they regularly brought in thirty films a year, all the other companies together might at best release one or two foreign films. 'Our films were subtitled. At first our audience was mostly young students and office girls, but later the films came to be appreciated by ordinary people. The critics helped us a great deal.'

On their 1936 trip they travelled via Los Angeles. 'We met Eddie Cantor and Bette Davis at Warners and Luise Rainer at Metro.' Mrs Kawakita recalls the prewar Venice festivals. 'The screenings were held in the gardens of the Excelsior Hotel. It was not very glamorous. There were no stars and the atmosphere was very serious and very political.' The Kawakitas enlivened the atmosphere at the 1938 festival by giving the first-ever Japanese party, for 200 guests: today the Japanese party is one of the major social events at Cannes.

Mrs Kawakita in front of Chaplin's caravan during the shooting of *Modern Times*.



1938 was to be their last European trip for thirteen years. Most of the European markets were closed off by the war and in any case film import was prohibited. Towa closed its office, and Mr Kawakita returned to China to head the group of Japanese-controlled studios and cinemas there.

In 1961 Mr Kawakita wrote about his experiences in the magazine *Kinema Jumbo*. Jay Leyda quotes from this in *Dianying, Electric Shadows*: 'In 1939, not yet able to enter the foreign concessions, Kawakita's first thought was: "What sort of films would this audience want?" His decision was to make them on former Chinese lines with established stars. "But I was criticised: these were not sufficiently political." When Manchurian films were brought to the Shanghai cinemas, the audience "did not welcome them". Kawakita was so nervous about his dilemma that he feared for his life. When open war on the concessionaires was declared in December 1941, Kawakita's position changed for the better. During the full occupation of Shanghai, however, he learned that "decisions could not be acted upon if pressed in a hurry." He was careful to use only one good cinema, the Roxy, for Japanese films (dubbed in Chinese): "not popular at first, but after six months, 90 per cent of the audience for these films were Chinese" . . . The only production under his supervision that satisfied both civil and military authorities was *Raising the Signal Fires Over Shanghai* (1944), co-directed by Hiroshi Inagaki and Yueh Feng.'

When her husband left for Shanghai, Mrs Kawakita stayed behind to give birth to their daughter, and eventually joined him in China in 1942. They were repatriated in 1946. 'At first we were evacuated from Shanghai to Peking. Finally, in February 1946, we were taken back by boat. There were 1,000 people packed into an American landing craft. Kazuko was seriously ill—as were

a lot of the other children on board. I was assigned the job of interpreter, and so I asked the Captain to let the children go up on deck. I think it saved their lives—as it was, Kazuko spent weeks in bed after we arrived back. The journey took four days but it felt like a year. The sea was terribly rough.'

On their return they found Tokyo a nightmare. Their house had been burnt down. Towa had to be built up from nothing; and meanwhile, because of the official position he had held in Shanghai, Mr Kawakita was purged by the Occupation Authorities and forbidden to engage in business. Mrs Kawakita reopened the office and found their old film stocks, which she and her helpers—recruited from others returning from China—had to wheel through the streets on a wooden cart. During the Occupation only British, American and French films might be shown. 'We had to suffer till 1951 and the end of Occupation. We were saved by Alexander Korda. He was very kind to us. We had known him before the war and he was the first person to offer us help. He let us distribute all his films—*The Jungle Book*, *Thief of Bagdad*, *The Four Feathers*, *'Pimpernel' Smith*. The French producers who remembered us from before the war were also helpful. We imported the Carnés and Clairs and Cocteau, and *Le Diable au Corps*.'

In 1951 the Kawakitas returned to Venice for the first time since 1938. Their personal popularity and skilful diplomacy played a major part in getting *Rashomon* and Kurosawa to the festival, where the film won the Golden Lion. 'Until *Rashomon* very few Japanese films had been seen in Europe. In the 1920s, Kinugasa's *Crossways* and *A Page of Madness* had had some distribution in cine-clubs, but that was about all.' From this time Japanese films figured in every festival and were always carefully and lovingly fostered by the Kawakitas.

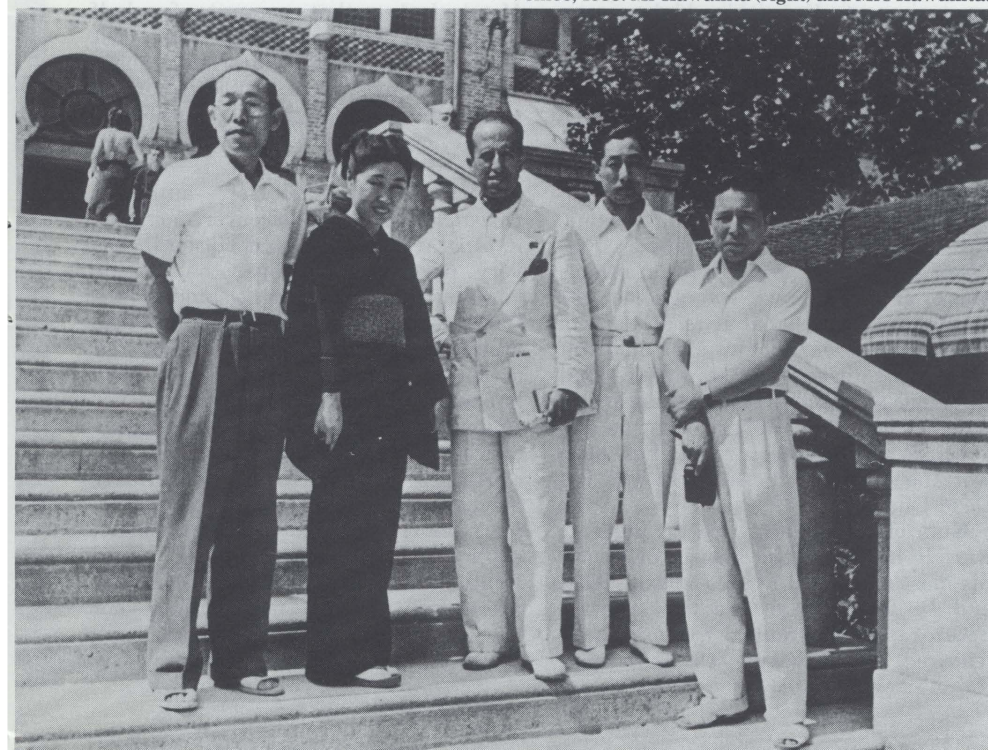
The films imported by Towa during the 50s continued to reflect the personal taste of the Kawakitas: they introduced to Japan the renaissance Buñuel and the first films of both French and English New Waves. Even more than in prewar days, as festivals proliferated, the Kawakitas became personal friends of very many of the film-makers whose work they showed. The era of this close personal involvement in distribution however came to an end in 1960, when Towa entered into a partnership with Toho, and the scale and the commercial ambitions of the company became much greater.

Meanwhile, however, Mrs Kawakita had discovered a new interest and a new way of serving Japanese cinema through contacts with the cinémathèque and archive movement. At the Berlin festival of 1953 (when Korda invited her to London for the Coronation) she first met Lotte Eisner of the Cinémathèque Française, and a firm friendship ensued. Other new friends included Gene Moskowitz, the much-loved Paris correspondent of *Variety*. In 1956 she came to London and established contacts with the British Film Institute, the National Film Archive and especially Derek Prouse, who was then programming the National Film Theatre. One of the first seasons at the new National Film Theatre, in October 1957, 'A Light in a Japanese Window', brought the startling revelation of Japanese cinema to London audiences.

Also in 1957 Lotte Eisner introduced Mrs Kawakita to Henri Langlois and together they planned a Japanese Film Week in Paris. Langlois proposed a more ambitious project, which was to show 150 French films in Tokyo and 150 historic Japanese films in Paris. Mrs Kawakita undertook to prepare the films for this, only to discover how little had been preserved from Japan's great film history. She studied the work of European film archives, approached all the Japanese producers, and in 1960 established the Japan Film Library Council. The same year she joined the newly formed executive committee of the Film Library Department of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Since then she has been tireless in saving films and promoting seasons and festivals of Japanese films abroad, while at home she was promoter, among other events, of the 1970 World Avant-Garde Film Season in Tokyo.

Meanwhile, her festival itineraries continue; every year she will be found serving on at least two or three international juries. If she no longer has the old thrill of buying and distributing films herself, she has the satisfaction of seeing the work which she and her husband began almost sixty years ago carried on with the same enthusiasm and idealistic zeal by her daughter and son-in-law: the Shibata Organisation, founded in 1968, not only distributes Jarmusch and Godard, but a handful of classics by Carné, Renoir and Cocteau that Towa might well have distributed before the Second World War. ■

Venice, 1938: Mr Kawakita (right) and Mrs Kawakita.





KUBRICK'S CONTROL

TERRENCE RAFFERTY

A new movie by Stanley Kubrick is something big, like a manned space mission. In the time it takes him to make a picture—he has done five in the last 23 years—you could get to Jupiter. The long gestation period between the idea and its fulfilment creates an agonising, not very pleasant kind of suspense, an anxious, slow-motion tedium of anticipation in which the tiniest events (or rumours of events) are magnified absurdly, until they are swollen with meaning. And when the great creation is, at last, delivered, it has become—partly through Kubrick's labour and partly through our own imaginative projections—as daunting and inscrutable as a monolith, a great black object that doesn't take the light.

It is no wonder that critics often approach a new Kubrick film with an almost childlike timidity: ever since 2001, which was greeted rather rudely on its initial New York release in 1968, they've been worried that they're not quite *evolved* enough to penetrate the

mysteries of Kubrick's higher consciousness. His idiosyncrasies are so confident, so authoritative, his methods are so deliberate, it seems inconceivable that the weird stuff he has been putting up on the screen could be the reflection of simple confusion rather than the product of a highly sophisticated aesthetic and intellectual system. Now Kubrick's 'Vietnam movie', *Full Metal Jacket*, has arrived, in an atmosphere of muted awe—though no one seems quite sure what it is. It's one of the strangest war movies ever made, at once so hysterical and so austere that it suggests an unnatural coupling of Sam Fuller and Robert Bresson. In a sense, it's the picture he has been working up to all these years: *The Big Dead One*.

Kubrick is certainly no stranger to war. It has been the subject of two of his most successful films, *Paths of Glory* and *Dr Strangelove*, and two others—*Spartacus* and *Barry Lyndon*—have featured battle sequences: with *Full*

Metal Jacket, that accounts for half the movies he has made in the last thirty years. What's surprising about his new film is not its subject, but the specificity of the material. Gustav Hasford's novel *The Short-Timers*, from which *Full Metal Jacket* is adapted (by Kubrick, Michael Herr—author of *Dispatches* and the voiceover narration in *Apocalypse Now*—and Hasford), has very particular settings: the Marine training camp at Parris Island, South Carolina, and then Vietnam in 1968, around the time of the Tet offensive. The action of the novel could only have happened in these places, at that time, and we all know it—and the historical nature of the material is a formal constraint that Kubrick has deliberately avoided for virtually his entire career. He favours vague futures and remote, explicitly imaginary pasts, and locations that can't be pinned down too precisely, that are neither here nor there. His movies, with their artificial, eerily pristine look, are self-consciously

timeless and, in essence, placeless, too: adrift in space, where time bends back on itself. The massive, symmetrical compositions of *2001* and *The Shining*, blindingly lighted and sparsely detailed, look as though they were filmed on location in eternity.

On the face of it, Hasford's gritty and idiomatic novel (which was based on his own experiences as a Marine in Vietnam) seems an unlikely candidate for Kubrick's characteristic spatial and temporal abstractions. It's difficult to imagine that even an artist as strong-willed as Kubrick could dare to transform this story, this war that is still so fresh in our memories, into something 'timeless', a slide-show of generalities about human aggression. But that is exactly what he tries to do: with some success in the film's harrowing first half, which records the Marines' stateside basic training, and with disastrous consequences thereafter, when the action shifts to Vietnam.

Military training is, by its very nature, something fixed and uniform and repetitive, an endless, numbing loop of drills and chants, and on Parris Island Kubrick truly seems at home. He is much more reluctant to leave this highly structured environment than the novelist was: Hasford devotes a mere 30 pages (out of the book's 180) to the training camp, and Kubrick spends nearly half the movie on it. The barracks are as vast and antiseptic-looking as the kitchen of the Overlook Hotel, as menacingly self-contained as the huge uterine cabin of *2001*'s spacecraft. It is immediately clear that a large part of what attracted Kubrick to Hasford's novel was its vision of the Marine Corps as an alternate universe, a shadow-world with its own laws and language.

Kubrick's Parris Island (recreated, of course, on English soundstages and countryside) is a science-fiction landscape, suggesting variously a laboratory, a giant incubator and an operating theatre: the movie opens with a montage of recruits having their heads shaved, as if they were being prepared for surgery on their brains. For the next 45 minutes, Kubrick takes us through the whole operation, in grisly, clinical detail—a process by which all traces of civilisation are ground away and human impulses are reduced to a pure, murderous animal essence. 'You're not even human fucking beings,' the recruits' drill sergeant (Lee Ermey) tells them, in their first encounter. And he announces his intentions: 'You will be a weapon.' At Parris Island, these young men are meant to die as themselves and be born again as killing machines, helpless and forlorn as that axe-wielding cosmic puppet Jack Torrance: psychopaths of glory.

On its own terms, this long training-camp sequence is remarkable—a rigorous, concentrated, brilliantly sustained assault on the sensibilities. Kubrick gives us very little conversation among the recruits, and almost no information, visual or otherwise, to enable us to distinguish one from another. The only

recruits to stand out at all are the narrator, Private Joker (Matthew Modine), who does John Wayne imitations and is occasionally allowed to register a thoughtful look, and fat Private Pyle (Vincent D'Onofrio), named (like all the others, by the sergeant) after the bumbling hero of a Marine tv comedy of the 60s, because he is the stupidest and most physically inept of the bunch.

The recruits' experience is rendered almost entirely in static, repetitive scenes of the demonic Sergeant Hartman screaming abuse ('You're so ugly you could be a modern art masterpiece') and of the recruits running gruelling endurance courses, sprinkled with a few Monty Python like drill routines in which the Marines trot in step while chanting inane military doggerel ('I love working for Uncle Sam/It lets me know just who I am'). It's all ritual, incantation, and furious grimacing by pale, shaven-headed men in skivvies—a real theatre-of-cruelty spectacle, presented with a single-mindedness that's startling in a big-budget studio movie. This is not exactly a new mode for

● I love working
for Uncle Sam,
It lets me know
just who I am. ●

Kubrick, and the themes it serves—dehumanisation, the blurring of individual differences, the devolution of personality to something brutish and fundamental—are among his most characteristic. But he has never let us know just who (he thinks) we are with such relentless savagery of attack. It is not only Hartman who seems to relish the violent stripping of the recruits' identities: we sense, too, the director's satisfaction with the grim efficiency of his work, and with the awful and, in his eyes, inevitable power of its outcome.

Visually, Kubrick's misanthropic argument is flawless, hermetic as an airlock. The compositions are so stark, so minimalist that they could be, well, modern art masterpieces—white skivvies on white flesh against shining white walls and floors, all bathed in bland fluorescence or the milky light of almost-sunny days. The look of the film, at this point, is as bare and basic as Kubrick wants us to believe his message is: it's the look of the laboratory, of truths painstakingly arrived at by the scrupulous exclusion of contingency, the systematic elimination of all variables. In aesthetic terms, Kubrick's approach in the Parris Island segments seems radical: philosophically, though, it's retrograde. His thought is nineteenth-century, positivist, the kind of pseudo-science that classifies human behaviour by observable (and prejudicial) physical

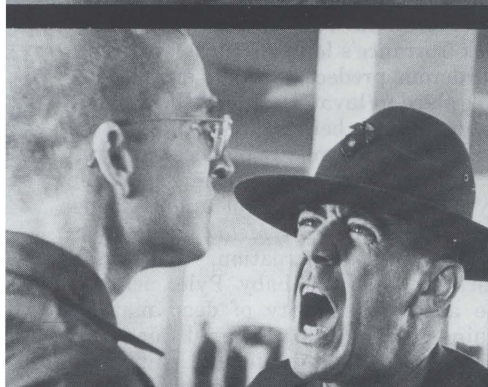
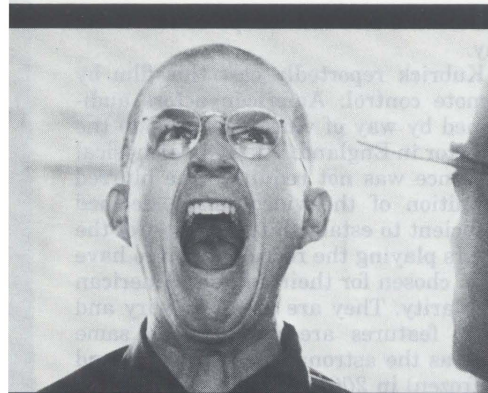
traits—the size and shape of the head, say.

Kubrick reportedly cast this film by remote control: American actors auditioned by way of videotapes sent to the director in England. The actor's physical presence was not required, the blurred definition of the video image deemed sufficient to establish types. Most of the actors playing the recruits seem to have been chosen for their dull, all-American similarity. They are lean and wiry and their features are regular—the same type as the astronauts (both frozen and unfrozen) in *2001*. Against this uniform human background (the control group, in experimental terms) the anomaly, carefully isolated visually, is fat Pyle, cast by Kubrick both against credibility—this appalling specimen would hardly have passed a Marine physical—and against the novel's description of the character as a 'skinny red-neck'.

In Hasford's book, where the horrors of both training and war are disturbingly casual, Pyle is nothing special, just a simple-minded country boy who goes crazy in the pressured environment of the camp. Transplanted to Kubrick's world, where nothing is casual, Pyle has become a swollen, over-stuffed metaphor, a great white whale of meaning. The blubbery Pyle Kubrick puts before our eyes is explicitly infantile: we are meant to see in him a symbol of what the Marine Corps is giving birth to. In some sense, Pyle—who gradually becomes Hartman's most perfect creation, a being who identifies himself, totally and unthinkingly, with his rifle—is an over-programmed machine that runs amok and turns on its creator, as HAL did. But Kubrick, by casting an actor who suggests an overgrown baby, pushes his interpretation of Pyle's breakdown beyond the realm of the mechanical, into the biological.

The violent resolution of Kubrick's Parris Island experiment is a confrontation between Hartman and Pyle (with Joker, as always, observing), and takes place in a gleaming lavatory with exposed toilets—a set he treats with an odd reverence, as if it were a shrine to the body and its most basic, undeniable demands, the ultimate metaphor for the human condition. (In the novel, this scene is set in the squad bay where the recruits sleep. The change of location is certainly Kubrick's idea. Several of the key scenes in *The Shining*, including Jack Torrance's long encounter with his murderous predecessor/alter ego Grady, took place in lavatories, too.) It's a place where human beings are equalised by their needs, where our physical nature, in Kubrick's view, gives the lie to our myths of individuality, of unique identity—where, in *Full Metal Jacket*, the creator and the creation, the father Hartman and the baby Pyle, achieve the absolute equality of dead matter, brains and guts smeared on the chamber's walls like illegible graffiti.

It may be significant that the door to this room is labelled, military-style, 'Head'—because the head, Kubrick's head, is where this movie is really



Parris Island and Vietnam:
Matthew Modine, Lee Erme.

taking place. The most fascinating thing about *Full Metal Jacket* is that for the first time in years Kubrick has a story that forces him to engage, on some level, an external, verifiable reality: he has to 'get into the shit', as Hasford's Marines refer to going into battle. And he can't do it. As a long-time expatriate, Kubrick undoubtedly finds it difficult to identify with the native country he has rejected. But shooting the entire film, both the 'American' and the 'Vietnamese' segments, close to home in England suggests something in Kubrick that goes beyond the desire to maintain an aesthetic, ironic distance: the wilful perversity of this decision seems the symptom of a deeper confusion.

In *Platoon*, Oliver Stone kept telling us, 'I was there'; Kubrick goes to extraordinary lengths to tell us that *he* wasn't. His Vietnam looks, very self-consciously, like the bombed-out European landscapes of World War Two movies (the climactic scenes set in Huế were shot in south London). The formal distance he imposes on the material is, like his refusal to sympathise with his characters, the habit of a lifetime: these qualities even serve him well in the Parris Island segment, where a cold, dehumanising institutional ferocity is the subject. But when he gets to 'Vietnam', his methods seem worse than inappropriate: they're evasive. It's unseemly of him to dissociate himself, in this haughty, aestheticised way, from what America did in Southeast Asia. He wants us to know he's clean, and in doing so wipes out his Marines' personalities as thoroughly as the drill sergeant does. We can almost feel him scrubbing harder and harder to get the damned spots out, and there is something very sad about the effort.

Oliver Stone's autobiographical narration in *Platoon* expressed the idea that Americans in Vietnam were really at war with themselves, and that is perhaps the only sense in which Stanley Kubrick can be said to be 'in' Vietnam: if *Full Metal Jacket* is about anything, it is about an artist at war with himself. For years, Kubrick has been elaborating the idea that what we think of as human identity is an empty concept, that the very notion of an essential self is a sham. It must have been a great relief to him to move from the rock-hard American star personality of Kirk Douglas in *Spartacus* (that picture, Kubrick's last in the US, was also produced by its star) to the chameleon virtuosity of Peter Sellers in his next two pictures. As the playwright Clare Quilty in *Lolita*, Sellers assumed a variety of accents and disguises in the course of his demonic surveillance of Humbert and Lolita. In *Dr Strangelove*, Kubrick had Sellers play three different characters—a British airforce officer, the American President and the high-Teutonic Dr S—and surrounded him with American actors, each locked into a single cartoonish role.

The Americans seem to illustrate what Kubrick thinks of people with solid, highly defined identities: they are

absurd and dangerous and totally artificial. In a kind of extension of the Quilty role in *Lolita*, Kubrick uses Sellers' extreme changeability, his capacity for emptying out his own personality and filling it with an infinite variety of others, as a reproach to the forceful styles of George C. Scott, Sterling Hayden and Slim Pickens. The only reason for Sellers to be playing three roles is to celebrate the principle of violent mutability upon which his acting is based. In a sense, Kubrick's entire career since then—both the material circumstances of his move from America to England and his developing 'philosophy' of personality—may be attributable to the difference between Kirk Douglas and Peter Sellers.

His next two films after *Strangelove* explored imaginary future worlds in which human beings are blank, featureless, floating in a void, and the liveliest personality belongs to an artificial intelligence (2001); and in which even our strongest impulses are subject to manipulation by technology, processes that turn our malleable natures from evil to good and back again with the ease of changing channels by remote control (*A Clockwork Orange*). And Barry Lyndon, played by a colourless Ryan O'Neal, was Kubrick's characteristically abstract and extreme version of a classic picaresque hero: an alienated, unprincipled character who thinks nothing of changing his name, his appearance, his speech patterns, his very identity to facilitate his progress through the world. (Every picaresque hero is a man without qualities, whose facility in immersing himself in radically different environments is a reflection of the most profound detachment.) Kubrick had, at this point, developed a cinema in which only three kinds of people exist: ones with no personality at all; ones with overdetermined personalities—caricatures—who are invariably gross and vicious; and (the most interesting category) those whose 'personalities' consist of a succession of assumed identities. Each of these types, of course, is a variation on a single idea: that identity is form without content.

What made these films so infuriating (even at their most impressive) was their air of superiority: the spectacle of Kubrick systematically dismantling the integrity of his characters' selves while asserting, with his overbearing technical mastery and formal control, the awesome force of his own personality. But *The Shining*, his messy, hall-of-mirrors horror movie, hinted at a slightly less assured, more ambivalent attitude. For the first time since *Spartacus*, twenty years earlier, Kubrick allowed a big star—an American, at that—a place in his meticulously ordered world. The way he used Jack Nicholson is, in a sense, predictable. As Jack Torrance becomes madder and more deadly, the actor gradually hardens into a wicked caricature of himself—'Jack Nicholson' trapped in a tight corridor of quotation marks, literally frozen in place, a statue

with permanently arched eyebrows. Torrance, though, is also in some sense Kubrick as he sees himself in the mirror—an obsessive, isolated artist-figure who is more at home with the phantoms of his imagination than he is with real human beings, who is imprisoned by a sense of his own timelessness, who asserts his one small truth ('All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy') doggedly, endlessly.

It is impossible to know how consciously *The Shining* is a derisive self-portrait of the artist, but something about either the story or the star, or both, seems to have spooked Kubrick. We sense a slackening of his iron control here, an inability to resolve all the thematic and visual associations into an airtight formal scheme. As the picture careens from one room and one idea to another and another, helter-skelter, we sense a tremor of fear, a bit of vertigo from Kubrick's lofty overlook. It is as if, while editing the film, he had begun to shine to the implications of his notions of identity, as if he suspected that what he had done to his American star—rendered him static, immutable—might be the image of what he had done to himself. The final incoherence of *The Shining* is, for Kubrick, an act of self-alienation—which in this case may also be a form of self-protection.

'Talking to dead people is not a healthy habit for a living person to cultivate and lately I have been talking to dead people quite a lot,' says Hasford's

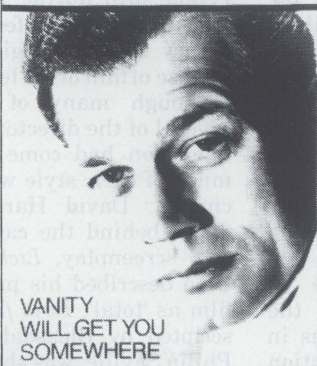
narrator in *The Short-Timers*. That statement is nowhere to be found in *Full Metal Jacket*, which seems strange: surely these words should be resonant for the man who made *The Shining*. But *Full Metal Jacket* shows Kubrick once again approaching and then pulling back from the exploration of his own identity. He doesn't have to love working for, or on, Uncle Sam—but shouldn't it tell him something about who he is? Inadvertently, it does. Kubrick's camera, helplessly expressive, is as fascinated by the awful Sergeant Hartman as it was by Torrance in *The Shining*. Kubrick must be aware that Hartman is, among other things, a monstrous parody of a godlike, autocratic director, and that basic training is a nightmare image of actors rehearsing their roles. The overtly theatrical intensity of these scenes, combined with a flicker of recognition in Kubrick's treatment of Hartman, suggests a (near) acknowledgment by the artist that his fancy ideas about the essence of human nature are, in fact, ideas about acting. Carried to its conclusion, this would be scary self-knowledge indeed. It would mean that for much of his artistic life Kubrick has been guilty of the same brutal subjugation of nature that the military practises in its training courses and that the United States inflicted on Vietnam, and for the same reasons—sheer 'American' arrogance and desire for control. And Hartman's death, in these terms, would be the director's suicide, a bizarre

ritual disembowelment of himself.

As it turns out, though, Kubrick only appears to fall on his sword in shame: he fakes it, for effect. The rhetoric of the film is that the sergeant's death, occurring halfway through, marks a turning point. Kubrick has given him such prominence that his absence in the second half of the movie actually defines (and thus distorts) the meaning of the Marines' experience in Vietnam. In retrospect, we see Hartman's orderly, authoritarian world as somehow preferable to living 'in the shit' of a war without rules, without form. It's certainly aesthetically preferable, since the Vietnamese half of the film, to be effective, would need some emotional centre, a few characters who haven't been dehumanised, whose deaths we would feel as loss—but Kubrick can't identify with the grunts. He is still with Hartman, trying to direct from a vast distance, from beyond the grave. His perfect compositions look increasingly irrelevant, unreal; his Vietnam looks more and more like a landscape of the mind; his control is remote control, like a stateside general's. His failures of nerve, of sympathy, of self-knowledge hauntingly embody his country's failures in the Southeast Asian war: against his obvious intentions, this movie brands Stanley Kubrick as an all-American film-maker, naive and trapped as an astronaut. How far into space will he have to go before he meets himself again? ■

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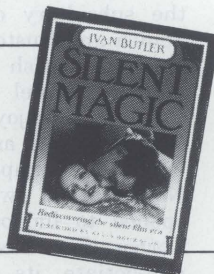
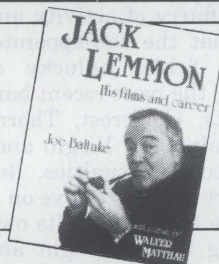
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FILM REVIEW 1987-8

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FILM TITLES FROM



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Right: David Rose receiving the first Roberto Rossellini Award from Isabella Rossellini.

Centre: Elizabeth Edmonds in *Experience Preferred But Not Essential*, one of Channel 4's first big successes in America.

Far right: Emily Lloyd in *Wish You Were Here*.



COMMISSIONING

Over the years, the British film industry has seen its share of white knights. The regular scenario begins with a ringing declaration of heroic intent, then a grand flurry of activity and the revelation that the self-appointed saviour is sickly, fickle, unlucky or insolvent. Among the most recent band of doughty gallants, Goldcrest, Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment, Virgin and Cannon are conspicuous casualties. But the age of chivalry appears to live on in Channel 4, a white knight with its own castle, still fighting the good fight and now older, wiser and garlanded with laurels.

The happy fact that Channel 4 is insulated by its fortress position as an established broadcaster has enabled its Senior Commissioning Editor for Fiction, David Rose, to provide filmmakers with a continuity of financial support not seen since the heyday of Michael Balcon's Ealing Studios some forty years ago. And the success with which Rose and his boss, Jeremy Isaacs, have established 'Film on Four' so firmly within the Channel's schedule has probably done more than anything else to give Channel 4 an identity of its own both at home and abroad.

At this year's Cannes Festival, David Rose received the first Roberto Rossellini Award. Bestowed by a jury of filmmakers, it was an appropriate recognition of his sponsorship of so many new writers and directors. As if to confirm the award, Channel 4's *Wish You Were Here*, from the veteran writer but first-time director David Leland, won the international critics' award at the Directors' Fortnight. And the critical accolade was matched at the market-

place with the Channel's sales arm, Film Four International, recording business that was brisk enough to make *Wish You Were Here* their first film to cover its production costs before its domestic theatrical release. Together with *Wish You Were Here*, co-financed with Zenith Productions, a subsidiary of Central Television, Film Four International also fielded *A Month in the Country*, co-financed with Euston Films, the subsidiary of Thames Television. Zenith and Euston belong to a growing band of British broadcasters eager to follow Channel 4 in producing films which can enjoy a theatrical life in Britain as well as overseas.

The BBC is impatient to join this club. Now that its own schedules are being opened to independent producers, the Corporation has fresh incentive to renegotiate its agreement with the technicians' union, BETA, which has in the past restricted the wider distribution of its filmed drama. The BBC has recently taken tentative steps down the Channel 4 trail by co-producing *Little Sister*, which is available for theatrical distribution abroad, and by announcing its intention to finance one or two British features a year. With British broadcasters emulating 'Film on Four' so quickly, history appears to be on Channel 4's side.

'Film on Four' grew out of that tradition of filmed drama on British television which David Rose did much to nourish as Head of Drama at the BBC's Pebble Mill Studio during the 70s. Based in Birmingham, Rose went out of his way to foster writers new to television for BBC2's 'Thirty Minute Theatre'—later

to become 'Second City Firsts'—and then 'Play for Today'. Alan Plater, Malcolm Bradbury, Willy Russell, Alan Bleasdale and David Hare were among the writers; their work was directed by, among others, Jim Goddard, John MacKenzie, Mike Leigh, Philip Saville, Michael Apted and Alan Clarke.

The most memorable programmes from Pebble Mill during Rose's tenure were marked by a preference for contemporary subjects, regional locations and the use of film or, at least, film technique. Although many of the writers and several of the directors who were new to television had come from the theatre, much of their style was drawn from the cinema. David Hare, who made his debut behind the camera directing his own screenplay, *Licking Hitler*, at the time described his preference for using film as 'total'. *Boys from the Blackstuff*, scripted by Bleasdale and directed by Philip Saville, was shot on video, but the technicians were directed to use the lightweight electronic cameras in the manner of a film unit. They worked with a single camera, taking separate shots, rather than cutting 'live' from one camera to another in the usual way.

Several of Rose's protégés at Pebble Mill have subsequently enjoyed his patronage at Channel 4, but they are only one element within a broad group whose work for the Channel has made 'Film on Four' so distinctive in its variety. Even so, 'Film on Four' was criticised, especially in its early days, for the similarity between much of its output and the kind of drama showcased on 'Play for Today'. In its first year, Neil Jordan's *Angel* and Peter Greenaway's



EDITOR

David Rose interviewed by
NICOLAS KENT

The Draughtsman's Contract were cited as rare exceptions to the general complaint that 'Film on Four' was bringing little that was new to British television.

But 'Film on Four' was original in that, by giving selected films a theatrical release, it allowed them to escape from the ghetto in which all television drama had until then been confined—that of transient product. It was this argument, a year after the launch of Channel 4, which Jeremy Isaacs used to justify the expense of the 'Film on Four' slot. 'Obviously there is a problem,' he said, 'because there we are spending about a twelfth or a thirteenth of our total programme budget on only twenty programmes out of a total of 3,000 hours of programming. On the other hand, these things have a socio-cultural prominence and purpose, as well as being simply a contribution to ratings' (*Stills*, May/June 1983).

Film-makers, both British and foreign, were attracted to 'Film on Four' by the prospect of theatrical distribution. Over the years, Rose and his colleagues have encouraged writers and directors new to the medium (Neil Jordan, Hanif Kureishi, Brian Gilbert); helped to fund the work of more experienced British directors with projects which seemed to have become terminally stalled (Derek Jarman, Peter Greenaway, Bill Douglas), and co-financed work by Wim Wenders, Agnès Varda, Andrei Tarkovsky and John Huston.

After seven years, which he describes as 'the most exciting time of my life', David Rose was due to have retired as Senior Commissioning Editor for Fiction in March 1988, but has recently been

persuaded to stay on. He talked about his work in his office at Channel 4's London headquarters in Charlotte Street.

NICOLAS KENT: What was your brief when you began at Channel 4?

DAVID ROSE: When Jeremy Isaacs invited me to meet him at his then office in the IBA building, I didn't know a great deal about Channel 4 and its remit. I thought he wanted to talk to me about being Head of Drama, but within a few minutes I realised he had something very different in mind. He clearly recognised that the requirement to work with a significant number of independent producers provided an opportunity for film-makers to make films for the Channel that could also be seen in the cinema worldwide. That was new for British broadcasting, because of the restrictions which existed and still exist.

Certainly, in my experience at the BBC a number of 'films' had been produced, generally for 'Play for Today', and several could have stood up very well in the cinema. At least one of Kenith Trodd's Denis Potter productions, *Brimstone and Treacle*, was made into a cinema film. *Penda's Fen*, written by David Rudkin and directed by Alan Clarke [which Rose produced with Barry Hanson at Pebble Mill], may not have had wide popular distribution but I do believe it could have been seen on the independent circuit. Again, Alan Bleasdale's first feature-length film, *Muscle Market*, directed by Alan Dossier, was very strong and entertaining with marvellous performances by Peter Postlethwaite and Alison Steadman.

What are the elements that make a piece of fiction a film rather than a television play?

Writers approach the work differently, they know the advantages and disadvantages. Screenplays are written with the knowledge that they are to be made into films. The studio-based play is, to my mind, essentially a more literary work. It is dialogue-based and the direction is approached differently. Although it is an advantage for the actors to play in continuous time, the director knows that once they are rolling in the studio he is in the hands of those actors and there is little he can do about that, even if there is a certain amount of post-production work to be done. With a film, the writer knows he has the freedom to set down what he wishes to see and hear and that the director can probably fulfil those requirements. The writer will also know that the chemical properties of filmstock create an atmosphere that is rarely captured by electronic cameras. Television sees far too much.

But surely the disposable and immediate qualities of television drama confer some real advantages?

I won't disagree with that. I can't disagree with that as a producer for four years of *Z Cars* because I think that immediacy was immensely important. But not all television drama is of that nature. Often it is adaptations of comfortable and reassuring period novels. That literary quality takes the immediacy out of it.

I am not decrying the benefit of the studio, but the single play cannot be

protected. I am sad in some ways that it has gone out of favour, but indeed it has. One reason was that too many technical aids came along and everyone got hyper on the possibilities of post-production: gimmickry got in the way of the good play. The BBC still produces strong single plays but the rrv companies seem to have lost faith in them, partly, I think, because the audience has not been responding. Film is there and there is no denying that it is immensely popular; and I think it has a longer and wider life.

What benefit does the possibility of cinema exhibition bring to those creatively involved in the production?

It's a very real bonus, especially for the writer and director, but also for the entire production team to know their work is to be shown in the cinema. The cinema is better equipped with critics than television. With one or two fine exceptions, television critics are all things to all men. Cinema exhibition brings the opportunity for work to be reviewed, as well as winning the kind of exposure at international festivals which is always encouraging and which happens very rarely to television plays.

What is your policy towards the 'theatrical window' you are prepared to allow a film and what has been your experience of cinema exhibition in Britain?

We have been extremely relaxed about giving windows that are as long as necessary. I have always thought that logic should prevail and that once the theatrical box office dropped to a certain level, the film should be free for television. This has meant that we have had to wait two or two and a half years for some films. We certainly have not done this because those films have made huge profits. It is good news that recently we have had modest but increasing financial success with one or two films, but we are still counting on one hand those productions which have actually recouped.

As for exhibition, I think that in most cases our films have been extremely well handled. Most have been seen on a small number of screens throughout the country owned by private exhibitors most of whom care a great deal about film. We have had little experience of the major distributors, but one or two of our films coming through now may have wider distribution, and it is going to be interesting to see how they are handled.

In setting up 'Film on Four', did you learn anything valuable from continental broadcasters such as ZDF and WDR in Germany?

Clearly, ZDF was a good model, although they do not appear to have maintained their support behind the German cinema. I went with Jeremy Isaacs on a whistle-stop tour through Germany, visiting Munich, the headquarters of ZDF, and the Cologne offices of WDR. We learnt something of their approach, but I don't think it taught us a great deal, other than that they had done it and it

had worked. In the main, I believe, we found our own way.

Are foreign broadcasters now approaching you to benefit from your experiences, and do you think the lessons you have learnt can be applied to other countries?

For the first two years, we had a presence at Cannes. We were really quite insignificant and no one knew we were there. There is no doubt that we now have quite a strong presence, and a number of countries are interested in the method by which we are able to present so many films at festivals, how they come to be made and what Channel 4 is. They are eager to know how television can have such a partnership with the cinema; a partnership which really doesn't exist in many countries.

I do think it's deplorable how little attention so many broadcasters around the world give to film. They may be afraid that it will cost them a great deal more, but if you compare the relative costs of studio-based drama and a feature film you will find there is not much difference in terms of cost per hour. Also, you can attract other monies into film which you could not attract to invest in a studio drama; and you can sell that film more freely around the world.

It's unlikely, however, that someone can simply pick up our model and put it down elsewhere. Channel 4 is peculiar to Britain and to British broadcasting. The subscription arrangement with the other rrv companies, I imagine, would be very difficult to emulate. All I can think is that we are giving encouragement to other countries to examine their own arrangements and perhaps have a stronger partnership with the cinema.

On what basis do you select projects to be commissioned?

We have over 2,000 submissions a year, a large proportion of which are scripts, and, of course, we also develop scripts ourselves. One criterion is to encourage

writers and directors new to the feature film. Going back to the beginning of 'Film on Four', I had known Neil Jordan as a writer from my BBC Birmingham days and, although for one reason or another his work was not actually produced there, I had no hesitation in giving the go ahead to *Angel*. *My Beautiful Laundrette* was Hanif Kureishi's first screenplay. That came about because my colleague, Karin Banborough, knew his work in the theatre and urged me to commission him. If you look back, we have had a singular degree of success from new people's work and we are maintaining that policy. Over the next three months, we have eight films in production of which five are by writers new to feature films and three are by directors new to features.

Did you anticipate a cinema release at the time you commissioned the script of *My Beautiful Laundrette*?

No, that decision came much later. In fact, when it went into production, I don't think anyone at Channel 4 or on the production team doubted that this was a film for television and that's why it was shot on 16mm. Well, we all got it wrong. It wasn't until I saw a fine cut that I talked to the Edinburgh Festival and they put it in their programme.

So, what other criteria do you have for selecting projects?

If you pick up a script and you immediately feel you have been there before, that it's derivative, then I would rather find something else. Frankly, I just want a script that makes me keep turning the pages. I certainly favour original work. Although we have supported a number of adaptations—a recent one is Pat O'Connor's *A Month in the Country*, which I think is a most distinguished piece of film-making—I have reservations about adaptations from the novel. I think you start with a burden and that it's only a very clever writer who can successfully shed that

A Month in the Country: Colin Firth and Kenneth Branagh.



burden. And I favour contemporary work. That is partly because I see quite a few period pieces on the other channels. I think the audience responds extremely well to contemporary drama. On occasion, it can illuminate a subject more clearly and with more effect than current affairs programmes.

From the script stage onwards, how does the commissioning process work and to what extent do you legitimately intervene in a production once it is under way?

We are publishers and we take an interest in the work we commission. We are regulated by the IBA and we have to recognise that there are guidelines. Given that, we all want to see the best quality that can be achieved in the time available and within the budget.

My principle is to introduce a new writer to a director with a view to them working together. Once we have a script, we discuss it with the writer and he or she will do one or perhaps two more drafts until we are satisfied. Normally, this would be done in conjunction with the director and the producer. Having put down money for the script to be developed, stage two is to put down money for that script to be assessed in order to draw up a schedule and a budget. Once that budget comes in, it will be scrutinised by our cost accountant, Therese Pickard. She will go through it in detail with the producer and there may be some adjustments.

At the beginning, when the first budgets came in, I was very anxious to scrutinise them. It was clear that some had the ingredients of the British film industry at its worst. If we had decided to go down that road we would not have made our target of twenty films; we would have made ten. We wanted to give the appropriate support to a production and we believed in putting money on the screen and not into limousines.

I now have a production budget which

I can put against my annual allocation. All commissioning editors work to someone and I work to Jeremy Isaacs, so he sees the script before it goes to the programme finance committee for approval. I think I'm right in saying that in six years Jeremy and I have not fallen out about anything.

Do the international sales division, Film Four International, see the script?

Certainly, when they know it's about to be commissioned, they will have a script, but I have to say that I have never had any comments from the sales department on how to make a film, let us say, more attractive. I have never been influenced in that way, and I hope that when we come to co-produce, we will resist casting a Frenchman, for instance, because we want French money.

What happens to the project once it has been through the finance committee?

Once approved, it will be negotiated with the production company and the film will go ahead. Contractually, we wish to have approval of central casting and key crew members—lighting cameraman, editor and composer. We wish to have access to the shoot and to the rushes and also view of the rough and fine cuts, at which point we would ask the director, at least, to listen to our observations. We also have approval of the final sound mix, which is absolutely crucial. We want to give all the support we can to the film-makers to make the best possible film within the parameters we have agreed. Over the years, I think it has been a relaxed two-way traffic.

What implications do the increased production costs have for 'Film on Four'?

It is not often now that I can fully fund a film. We have to seek more partners than we did in the first year. Look at the budgets. In the first year, I had £6m to spend on making twenty feature-length

films. In fact, we managed to make twenty-three. The average cost of those films was £400,000. Some of them were fully funded by Channel 4; some were part funded and monies were found from elsewhere. My budget in this current year is about £9.5m and the average cost of making a film is £1.2m. So, this year I will be pleased if in some way or other we can support sixteen or seventeen films.

A further implication is that, in addition to our inability to fund a film one hundred per cent, we are supporting more films simply at a UK licence level with a small investment amounting perhaps to only 20 per cent of the budget. But I'm pleased that the film-makers still seem to want to maintain the editorial involvement that we would have had with a more fully funded film. We have a very modest financial stake in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, which has been made by the *Beautiful Laundrette* team, but I suppose Karin Banborough and I have seen it five or six times.

What partnerships are you making in order to maintain this level of production?

On the back of its success in the States, the producers of *My Beautiful Laundrette* were able to raise substantial American involvement. I am not saying for a moment that the Americans are pouring money into our films, but involvement like that is helping to maintain a level if not of twenty then of sixteen or seventeen films.

We also find that we are talking to Simon Relph at British Screen quite regularly. British Screen is supported among others by Channel 4, and when it came into being, I thought the best situation would be if we didn't share in any films at all, and that more films would be made that way. As it turns out, film-makers need both of us and we are sharing in a number of films together with other partners. We have almost a daily dialogue with British Screen.

Given these circumstances, does Channel 4 still enjoy the privilege of protecting its film-makers from commercial constraints they might find elsewhere?

It hasn't changed *our* thinking in any way, but I see what you're getting at. British Screen is there to make money, but we would not be sharing with them in so many films if those were not films in which we believed. I have not sensed any pressure from British Screen to do things for what I would consider to be the wrong reasons.

Is that perhaps a fear you have for the future?

I think it is very difficult to look at the future. I am worried that the appetite for films will grow with more channels—cable and satellite and so on—and that does suggest to me that the quality of films will be damaged. I think we just have to hang on and do what we believe to be right. ■

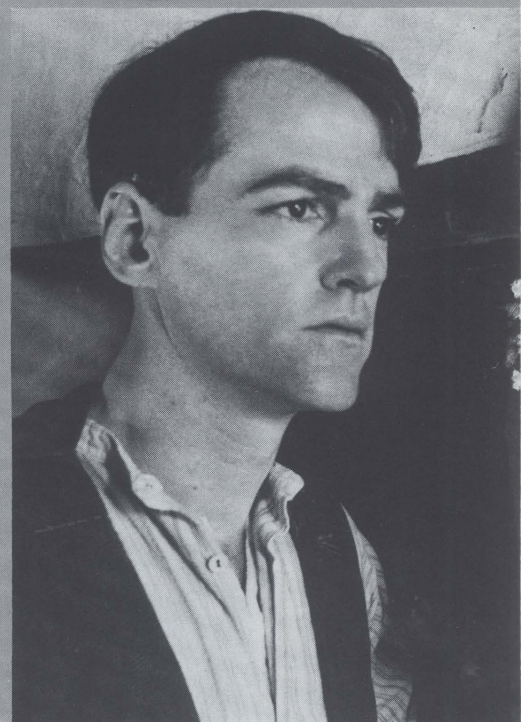
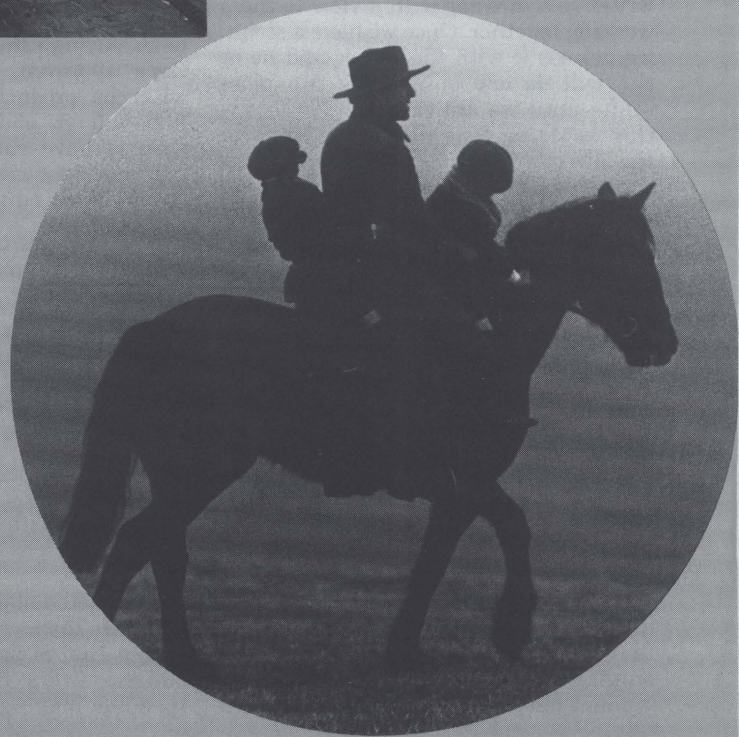
Sammy and Rosie Get Laid: Shashi Kapoor and Frances Barber.



On the Black Hill

A British Film Institute production, with British Screen and Channel 4, adapted from the novel about twin farming brothers by Bruce Chatwin; produced by Jennifer Howarth; written and directed by Andrew Grieve. Location report: page 232.

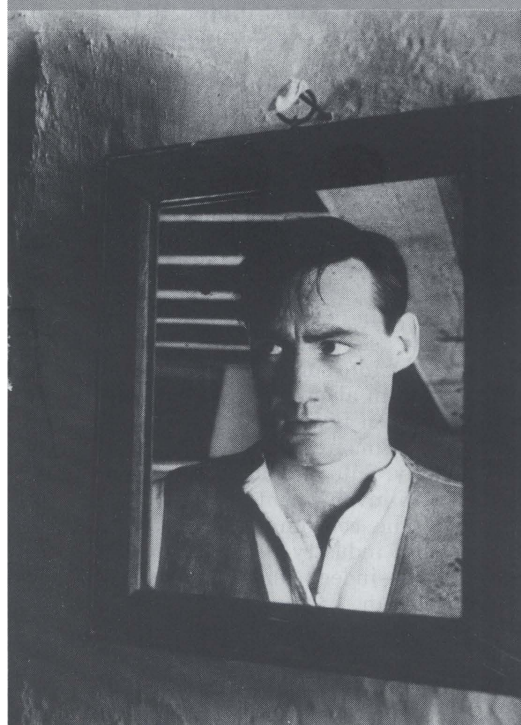
Photos: DAVID APLEBY; (bottom left) SIMON MEIN.





Above: Sowing on the Black Hill. Below right: Mike (Benjamin) and Robert Gwilym (Lewis), arrange the transfer of their farm, The Vision, to their nephew. Centre: Benjamin and the reflection of his absent brother. Bottom left: Gemma Jones (Mary) at

Lurkenhope 'Castle', having been to ask for the tenancy of The Vision. Left centre: Bob Peck (Amos) and Gemma Jones (his wife) at the Mafeking parade. Top left: Rhulen (Hay-on-Wye). Circle: Rhys (Benjamin) and Aled Baker (Lewis), aged 6, with Bob Peck (their father).



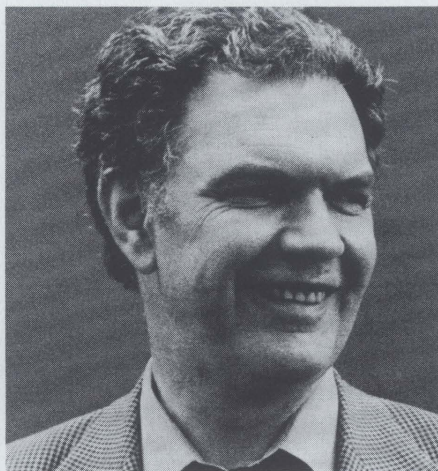
A DEGREE OF FREEDOM

'It's a very frustrating job. You've got very little money and you've an industry that doesn't want to change. You've got exhibitors with serious problems. You've got distributors who are really concerned with American product. You've film-makers who don't have a clear idea of the target audience because they've been so divorced from the audience for so long. You have a Government that doesn't care very much about the film industry. I don't think we can change things much on our own.'

Not surprisingly, Mamoun Hassan's gloomy assessment of his role as managing director of the National Film Finance Corporation, Britain's state-aided 'film bank', was spoken not long before his resignation in June 1984. Appointed five years earlier under a Labour administration that looked as though it was about to take the film industry seriously, he almost immediately found himself working in the climate created by a Conservative government with little enthusiasm for lame ducks, subsidy, or even the arts in general.

Hassan, previously production head of the BFI's film financing unit, deliberately attempted to shape and influence British film culture by supporting 'not only films that appeal to a popular audience but also films that feed ideas and invention. To attempt to separate these two aspects completely is to discourage the creation of a fully popular art.'

He failed largely through simple lack of resources. Pauline Kael's absurd assertion that 'the English can write and they can act . . . but they can't direct movies' would make more sense if it concluded 'but they can't finance movies'. John Grierson argued that if the art of cinema is to survive 'it will be wise for the artist to organise his independence.' The only independence British film-makers have regularly enjoyed is independence of a regular source of funds. 'Outside of a studio system or a national corporation, art is too precarious a business to be left to artists: it needs organisers. The importance of the producer-artist seems to be a specific feature of British cinema, an effect of the need continually to start again in the organisation of independence' (John



Simon Relph
at
British Screen

GUY PHELPS

Caughie, 'Broadcasting and the Cinema', in *All Our Yesterdays*, BFI, 1986).

Hassan's new start ground to a halt because he could never find regular partners for the projects he was prepared to back. In five years he helped make only a handful of films: Franco Rosso's *Babylon*, David Gladwell's *Memoirs of a Survivor*, Chris Petit's *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, Lindsay Anderson's *Britannia Hospital*, Bill Forsyth's *Gregory's Girl*, Richard Eyre's *Loose Connections*, Zelda Barron's *Secret Places*, Marek Kanievski's *Another Country*. Ironically, at the very end of his spell in office, the revival inspired by *Chariots of Fire* (a film financed by American and Egyptian money) made his search easier and he initiated as many films in his last few months as he had managed to complete in the previous years. But by then the demise of the NFFC was inevitable, its apparent lack of achievement in marked contrast to the

superficial health of the commercial industry. The well-publicised success of *Chariots of Fire*, *Gandhi*, *The Killing Fields*, *Educating Rita* and others had given British production a high (and generally misleading) profile, convincing the Government that continuing prosperity lay in the open market. Its response was not only to dismantle the system of meagre state support, but also to destroy the conditions which had encouraged the limited revival that had taken place.

'Recently a journalist who had found *The Answer* suggested that film should be treated no differently from ball-bearings. We should be so lucky. The ball-bearing industry has enjoyed considerable investment from the private sector and has benefited from government intervention.'

Mamoun Hassan, 1983

'In Germany and France you have cheap credit—in this country you have taxes.'

Disgruntled distributor, 1985

The key to the surge of new films had been the tax incentives introduced in the Finance Act of 1979 which allowed investment in film to be used by large companies, such as banks and corporations, to reduce their taxable profits. The scheme was resoundingly popular and was used to finance films on a rather broader scale than its devisers had envisaged. The Government was not amused to see large sums flowing, legitimately, into such productions as an American film about the Russian Revolution (Warren Beatty's *Reds*: associate producer, Simon Relph) and, less legitimately, into productions with no real British involvement at all.

One of the continuing trials of the British film industry is that there has never been—indeed under the present structure can never be—a unified Government film policy. Various aspects of film come under the aegis of different departments—Trade and Industry, Arts and Libraries, the Home Office, the

Treasury. One ministerial arm is not always aware of what others are doing. In July 1984, Kenneth Baker, then Films Minister (one of six since 1979), published a long-awaited White Paper in which the demolition of Government support for the industry was announced; the Eady Levy, which channelled a small proportion of box office revenues back into production, was abolished and the NFFC disbanded. Baker's plan, to liberate the industry from the state intervention which had been introduced to save it in the 40s, was devised with the good health of the commercial sector in mind, a health manifestly dependent on the tax incentive structure.

What Baker appeared not to know was that the Treasury had decided to stop trying to close loopholes in these regulations and had resolved instead to scrap the whole scheme. Over a period of three years the conditions which had drawn new money into film production and given some reality to the cry 'The British Are Coming' were to be wiped out. The pessimism with which the industry faced 1985, British Film Year, was understandable.

'Britain has to decide once and for all whether it is going to subscribe for, and support, an indigenous film industry that isn't simply the limpet of the American industry.'

Simon Relph, 1986

The Government did leave one vestigial element of support. It announced that the NFFC was to be replaced by a privatised body, the British Screen Finance Consortium, to straddle the gap between subsidy and investment. According to the White Paper, its brief was to provide 'opportunities for the talented young film-maker to find a foothold in the competitive world of commercial film-making.' (British Screen's own formula is subtly different: 'to encourage British talent and original high quality work, especially from younger, less established producers and directors.')

British Screen was not to be significantly better funded than its predecessor. The Department of Trade agreed to a grant of £7.5m over five years (£500,000 up to March 1986, £1.5m for each of the next four years, and £1m for the year ending March 1991). Urged on by the carrot of the ending of the Eady Levy, Rank and Thorn EMI (soon to become Cannon) agreed to invest £150,000 and £300,000 a year respectively for three years. Channel 4 Television, anticipating the benefit from co-production deals with British Screen, was happy to put in £300,000 a year for five years. No interest, principal or dividend was to be paid on any of these investments before 1989. The British Videogram Association was to have been the other arm of the company, but the infant video industry has rarely been able to agree a common policy on any issue and this proposal, which coincided with a period of decline in video rentals and widespread

FILMS INHERITED FROM THE NFFC

Comrades
Dance With A Stranger
Defence Of The Realm
Heavenly Pursuits
Nanou
No Surrender
A Room With A View
When The Wind Blows

BRITISH SCREEN 1986

The Belly Of An Architect
Empire State*
High Season
The Kitchen Toto*
Personal Services
Prick Up Your Ears
Rita, Sue And Bob Too

1987

American Roulette
The Dream Demon
The Dressmaker
Eat The Rich
The Last Of England
The Nature Of the Beast
On The Black Hill
Perugia
Stormy Monday
Sour Sweet
Vroom
A World Apart
plus 13 short films in a
BFI/Channel 4 scheme and
6 five-minute shorts

**Initiated by NFFC*

the NFFC, he had been strongly critical of the abrupt termination of that body, and shares many creative views and aims with his predecessor. But, if the sort of titles now being backed by British Screen are broadly similar to those supported by the NFFC, behind this apparent continuity lie important differences.

In the first place, while Hassan could advise the NFFC Board on prospective projects, it was the Board that took final decisions. Hassan was plagued by the problems of persuading members of strong personality and opinion to reach agreement, and had bitter fights over the Board's reluctance to commit to films like *Heat and Dust*, *Merry Christmas*, *Mr Lawrence* and *Moonlighting*. Relph has no such obstacles: the choices are essentially his own, reached after consultation with his three salaried officers. He informs the Board of decisions at quarterly meetings and is bound only to confer with his chairman if any investment exceeds £500,000. Decisions as a result can be made quickly and firmly, according to consistent and identifiable criteria.

Even when the old Board did finally agree to support a project, there was no guarantee that other finance was available. As a result money was often on offer for months or even years while the producer scrambled after the rest of the budget. The Corporation found itself in the peculiar and invidious position when it was fighting closure, that it was pleading with the Government for more money while having £5m in the bank, all committed to projects that had not yet found the balance, and might never do so.

Relph is determined that money will be making movies rather than accumulating in the bank. In British Screen's first year the paucity of films was such that he was forced to make unconditional offers of quite large sums of money simply to get the ball rolling. Since then British Screen's participation has always been qualified. 'I say I like a project but that investment will be

Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*.



subject to money being available when you have the rest of the budget. Juggling and timing result, but it seems a better way—and again, it couldn't be done with monthly board meetings: I need the authority.'

'I'm not one who believes that one should be subsidised to make films that nobody particularly wants to see just because in the view of a small number of people they are masterpieces.'

Simon Relph, 1985

'There is a feeling from certain quarters of the industry that British Screen should work entirely philanthropically and that nobody should take anything out. That simply won't work because unless the thing is made to be financially viable, then you won't get any other investors and the funds will simply diminish.'

Simon Relph, 1986

Even more crucial is Relph's determination to run British Screen along more commercial lines than the NFFC: an inevitable concomitant of privatisation that could appear, at first sight, to undermine the whole function of such a body and force it to become what Hassan feared, 'yet another underfunded film company'. The NFFC had been quite prepared to support worthy projects (like producer Relph's own *Comrades*, backed with almost £1m) whether the money could be recouped or not: quality was paramount. Money was not thrown away but big gambles were taken and maximum return was not a prerequisite—deals might even be arranged to favour the commercial partner if that would encourage the latter to commit*.

Relph argues that to follow this policy would rapidly run down the company's resources and that, with income guaranteed for only the first few years, he has to operate a less beneficent regime. Subsidy is not any longer an option—money will only be invested if there is thought to be a genuine likelihood of it being returned. So far, so bad. But Relph is also setting out to prove that this policy does not mean that the nature of the films need change to a significant degree. He forwards two reasons for this, one fortuitous, the other representing a radical change in attitude about how a body like British Screen should work.

First, in the last couple of years there has been a clear increase in the amount of money that films can fetch on the world market. Where British films previously might have raised only \$250,000 in America, this sum can now be several times as large. British Screen is simply able to get better prices than the NFFC could. Secondly, Relph has applied himself to exploring various ways of both

*The BFI Production Board is moving towards this role. British Screen was tempted into co-financing the BFI's *On the Black Hill* by the fact that terms very favourable to British Screen were being offered.



Harry Hook's *The Kitchen Toto*: Leo Wringer, Bob Peck.

maximising these returns and minimising the time they take to reach British Screen. Altogether, Relph's plans amount to an attempt to rethink some of the ways in which the media operate, and to involve British Screen in areas beyond the simple production of risky low-medium budget pictures. If they work, his schemes could significantly revitalise film-making here: there is little to lose if they fail.

'I believe that what is wrong with the industry has nothing to do with the product. We've been doing quite interesting and varied work which is true to ourselves and at the same time consistently appealing, but we are not getting a fair return financially. Although the films turn over considerable sums of money, they don't return significantly to the producers.'

Simon Relph, 1985

The main plank of Relph's philosophy is that there is still a huge demand for films—even if not everybody is prepared, or able, to travel to a cinema to see them. The central dilemma is that, though films may be seen by millions, often only relatively small amounts of money filter (slowly) back to their producers. The infamous *Alien* balance sheet of 1979, which showed that a film costing \$11m to make and returning £48m to the distributor (presumably therefore having taken well over \$100m at the box office) was still \$2½m in the red on paper, is not unique. And it is not all the result of 'creative accountancy' (that's theft to the rest of us): the powerful distributors and exhibitors ensure that deals are structured to their great advantage. Even in the low-budget area, films as successful as *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *The Ploughman's Lunch* are still not in profit. The huge international popularity of *A Room with*

a View is well-known, yet by mid-1987 British Screen had still not recovered its investment (25 per cent of the budget) let alone seen any of the substantial profit that will, eventually, accrue.

Relph is concerned to ensure that deals are struck which return money more quickly: unlike the NFFC, British Screen is not content to be last in the queue. Advances and pre-sales provide the obvious channel for rapid recoupment. Of the £3.2m committed by Relph in 1986, half was clawed back in pre-sales and guarantees which could then be reinvested the following year. Whereas British Screen could be involved in only seven pictures in its first year, this £1.6m when added to the returns on films bequeathed by the NFFC gave Relph approaching £5m for 1987, allowing investment in 12 films, a number more suited to his intention to back as many different projects as possible. Even this is a small proportion of the 250 projects proposed to the company, but Relph cannot recall ever having to turn down any film for which the rest of the budget was in place.

'All but one of the films from last year have a US distributor, and for this year's films we have American distributors competing to get involved.'

Simon Relph, 1987

A major problem of course is the weakness of the British theatrical market, and the all-powerful position of the United States. As a result, for a film costing more than £1.5m Relph is almost bound to insist on a finalised American distribution deal, with perhaps half the budget committed in the USA. He argues strongly that, in the past, British films have been virtually given away in the excitement of a transatlantic sale. Traditionally, the American distributor has been able to purchase all rights (network tv, cable, satellite and video

included) for little or nothing. Relph would like eventually to be able to sell rights separately, but is concentrating at present on getting better prices for less expense. He has set up the Sales Company to reduce the costs of recovering investments. Instead of paying 15-20 per cent, British Screen and its co-partners in the venture, Palace and Zenith, are now paying only 5-7½ per cent, and charging other companies a little more to use the facility. Relph is also keen to build on Denis O'Brien's strategy in handling *Time Bandits* in America. O'Brien put up print and advertising guarantees and turned a film that no major distributor was keen to handle into a considerable hit. Relph feels that by offering to provide distribution costs as well as the film itself he will be in a far stronger position to dictate better terms—and maybe even separate the rights. As a relatively low-risk, last in/first out investment this is the sort of development, supporting an export industry, that he hopes the Government will appreciate and back.

Another crucial area of attention is television. At the time of the legislative changes, there was much lobbying to support an amendment to the Films Bill to levy tv companies for showing feature films. Despite the support of the Government's own backbench media committee, the amendment was defeated. The result is that while an American producer might expect to recover 30 per cent of his costs from domestic television, his UK equivalent would be very lucky to see 10 per cent. *Chariots of Fire* was seen by 3½m viewers in British cinemas who paid £7m for the privilege. Its success ensured a particularly advantageous sale to television; yet this still only amounted to £1m for several screenings, the first of which drew an audience of over 14m.

Relph is not expecting the television companies suddenly to agree to pay more. 'The way I have been pursuing

Beeban Kidron directs Clive Owen and Diana Quick in *Vroom*.



Chris Menges' *A World Apart*: Jodhi May, Barbara Hershey. Photo: David Appleby.

that goal is to say: Look, I'll make films for you, your films. You can own them and have a real commercial interest in them. Because we can only get a small, modest income from UK theatrical release of the films, let's reverse it. You give me some decent money and I'll give you the films in priority, accepting limited release. I've tried to persuade Channel 4 to raise the slot cost of films they get involved with—but not to give up their project participation—because I think that by so doing you reduce the amount of money that has to be recouped from the rest of the world, and you give a greater chance of the film making a profit and encourage the vanished private investor.'

A scheme was devised whereby rtv companies would put up £5m a year for three years to make around 20 films with independent producers—a sort of 'British Screen on rtv', to be transmitted at peak time. The aim was to stop television thinking in terms of handouts to the film industry and start talking about the production of top quality programmes, towards which their contribution would be less than they spend on their own drama and in which they would have a substantial profit interest. Relph has another idea which could be made suitable for BBC participation, springing from his realisation of the impossibility of making now the sort of films with which he began his career 25 years ago. Then, a £100,000 picture could easily recover its cost in British cinemas. Its equivalent today, a £1-1½m feature, would have to sell all round the world to break even. Relph is sadly aware of good scripts that would have limited appeal outside Britain and which cannot be made.

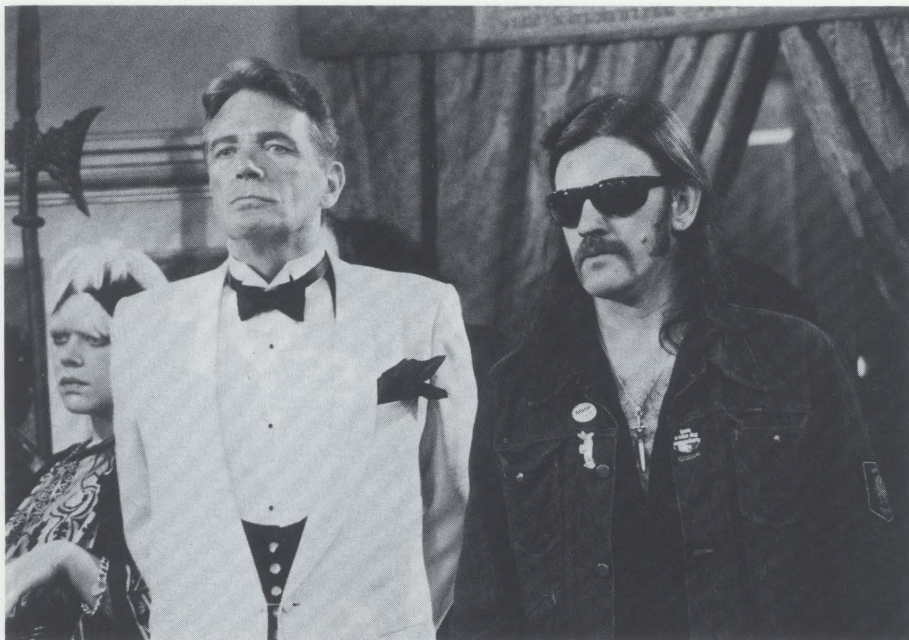
Television is one answer, but all Relph's thinking has had to be put aside while the whole thorny problem of access for independents to television is discussed and resolved. Only then can problems like the length of 'window' allowed for theatrical release before tv

transmission, and the position of the unions, concerned that in-house tv production may wither, be addressed.

If television may offer the key to recoupment, theatrical and video release remain seemingly intractable difficulties. Despite their involvement in British Screen, Rank and Cannon remain distinctly hard-headed in their dealings with the company as potential distributors and exhibitors. So far only *The Kitchen Toto* has been distributed by either company—it also remains the only film co-financed with either of the Big Two, though Relph is discussing a second project with Cannon. With smaller distributors, competition within the marketplace for the stronger British Screen pictures is ensuring better prices, but the dismal state into which the duopoly has allowed British cinemas to sink is a massive obstacle to progress. Relph would like to see an expanding number of independent cinemas and would welcome the chance to become involved in a grouping of such exhibitors, including perhaps some of the new multiplex operations, based on the Regional Film Theatre concept, but one suspects that this is likely to remain a dream.

As for video, Relph is uncharacteristically pessimistic, feeling that the whole structure of video distribution was misconceived from the start. The pattern was taken from book publishing, despite the obvious difference that whereas in publishing the major costs are in the process of publication, in video terms these are minimal. The film-makers who do incur the heavy costs receive absurdly small returns. Videos are cheap to hire or buy at the expense of the producer of the material. One option that Relph is considering is the establishment of a British Screen video label to exploit the attractive titles in the NFFC catalogue.

But maximising returns is only one side of an equation that Relph is determined to balance. The amount of money needed to break even is obviously



Peter Richardson's *Eat the Rich*: Ronald Allen, Lemmy of the rockband Motorhead.

intimately related to the amount spent in the first place. As a result of the cash sloshing around in the areas of commercials and rock videos, and in the high-budget world of US-financed motion pictures shot here by Spielberg, Lucas and others, the costs of making British films have escalated. There is no longer a sensible relationship between production cost and what that production can realistically be expected to earn. *Mona Lisa* and *A Room with a View* may succeed on the world market, but films with a narrower appeal are no longer viable. Relph's aim is to reconsider and control spending on films, especially low-budget productions without a major company involved, in the hope of discovering ways for them to be made primarily for the home market. Television money is certainly not always the answer for such projects.

'If someone came and put *Passport to Pimlico* on my desk, I would have to say it was lovely but who would go and see it outside the UK?'

Simon Relph, 1987

Here Relph really has a tiger by the tail. The unions have shown themselves to be agreeably flexible in the discussions leading to the setting up of Workshops (another area of production in which Relph is eager to become involved). They would be bound to be suspicious of any approach that merely allowed producers and financiers to make the same number of films for less money—an outcome that Relph himself would deplore. Some way of ensuring that lower costs guaranteed more films would be essential. And always the lack of real concern on the part of the major companies poses a huge barrier. The marketplace is controlled by large companies whose primary interests lie elsewhere. Rank put up substantial sums of (relatively safe) money through their distribution system

but find the riskier area of equity investment easy to resist. Their profits are ensured by a steady flow of American films. Cannon may have harboured serious plans for involvement in British films, but the parent company's worldwide problems surfaced before their good faith could even be tested. Their current designs concentrate more on re-routing American pictures to Elstree than on seriously encouraging indigenous production.

Clearly any progress in these areas will be slow—and Relph has only a short time to prove that British Screen is a viable body. At the end of 1988 Rank and Cannon have the option of maintaining their involvement in British Screen, or withdrawing. Neither company has offered any hints, and Relph argues that they are entitled to see how the first two years work out before considering their decisions. Meanwhile, he is actively pursuing new shareholders and is optimistic that a television company and a video production outfit may join. He is also hopeful that the Government, encouraged by British Screen's success, may offer further help: not through direct subvention but by lending money that is repayable. 'The way to approach is by talking of investment, not grant. They might do it if they can see that it will stimulate other investment.'

An early plan, to set up a production offshoot to attract funds under the Business Expansion Scheme, has been encouraged by the Treasury's recent decision to make it easier for film production to qualify under the scheme. The possibility of an industry fund which could become a major source of finance is now a real one, and it might be considered that British Screen is the ideal base for such a fund.

While pursuing the long-term goal of rearranging the equation so that films are made for less and generate more (with a greater proportion of their income earned in this country), Relph has also to manage the day-to-day running

of a new and growing company. He has been encouraged by the progress so far, but also made aware that the scope of the problems, and of the potential for solving them, is wider than he anticipated. His original intention to return to production after three years is already under review. He is determined to establish British Screen on a firm financial footing—going public and attracting private funds on the open market if all else fails—and this represents a five-year plan.

At the same time, he is hesitant about retaining the power of selecting film projects for the company for too long. He is not aware of serious criticism of his selections to date, and has tried hard to avoid imposing his own tastes and preferences: 'It's important to underline that British Screen was set up to support film-making in this country and it must do this in an even-handed way. If it appears to be highly selective and to deal with only one area, it's wrong. Which is why in this year's list I've got everything from a Jarman movie to a Comic Strip movie to a horror movie. I've tried to get that balance, nurturing every corner.'

If necessary Relph goes beyond the small circle of himself and his officers. Outside advice has been sought from respected persons considered likely to respond to the material without prejudice whenever Relph has felt that he has perhaps been unreasonably antagonistic to a project. On one occasion, opinions within British Screen were strongly divided, independent advice was sought, and the project supported despite Relph's personal misgivings. Such advice has been 'enormously useful as a sort of backstop—but as I have got more confident and have had more money, things haven't been so contentious.'

Inevitably, with more projects under way at any one time, Relph has found it hard to keep as close to them as he would like. While he accepts that his role precludes editorialising (British Screen's partners undertake this responsibility; 'we are here to support the producer, not to be the producer'), Relph has found that producers and directors do value his experience and are often eager to seek his advice. He tries to be available and involved at the post-production stage in particular, and derives considerable creative fulfilment from the executive producer/impresario role he now occupies. 'One is proud of the films as a grandfather rather than as a father. You still feel part of the movies, but not obviously so responsible.' Mamoun Hassan used to liken his position to that of midwife: make of that what you will.

On the administrative side, Relph's priority has been to keep costs down—he has moved the company to cheaper premises and managed with a minimal staff of only fourteen. He feels that some expansion is now necessary, intends to appoint one more manager and is considering taking on someone to select projects for backing: 'so that the industry feels that it is talking to a different person.' Somehow one feels this is unlikely to happen; choosing the films is so

central to the whole prosperity of British Screen. Relph's own experience as production administrator at the National Theatre will certainly have drawn his attention to the fact that a dominant role in artistic decision-making can reasonably be extended rather beyond three years, if not necessarily to fifteen.

'It is not just that the private sector is taking over the NFFC, the Government is giving it £1.5m a year to do so.'

Vincent Porter, 1985

Whichever way he turns, Relph can expect to be criticised. He has made the most of the 'honeymoon' period during which critics have been prepared to bury their opposition to privatisation and to the power conferred on the chief executive. The crucial period approaches when Rank and Cannon consider their options, when the Government's future attitude becomes clearer, when Relph's long-nurtured but as yet unfulfilled plans to introduce new shareholders are realised, or collapse, when the two sides of the production equation tilt in the right direction or lurch back into what could be a terminal imbalance. If Relph is successful he will come under pressure from those who feel that British Screen occupies too dominant a position at screen centre in a fragmented industry, sucking in funds that might have been attracted to disparate sources.

Success could bring other problems. British Screen was born at (yet another) low point in British film production fortunes when hardly any films were being made. Of the thirty companies that could be approached for film finance only five years ago, barely half a dozen

survive today. In 1986 a mere 39 commercial features were completed, of which eleven were to a significant degree American. Only Channel 4, with money in nine productions, outdid British Screen's seven. As a result, even relatively commercial projects like *Personal Services* were unable to attract finance. British Screen and Zenith put up the budget as equal partners and at total risk. Only after the film was completed were sales made—indeed the costs were then largely covered before the film was even released. In a less depressed climate, such as the one Relph hopes to help into existence, such projects should not really need British Screen involvement. But, without these potentially profitable investments, British Screen would be unable to support the riskier projects: a vicious circle could force the company into an ever narrower band of pictures.

For the moment, films like *Personal Services* and others inherited from the NFFC have given Relph a flying start, enabling him to establish a reputation for quality and to increase considerably the funds at his disposal. Such advantages can be lost as quickly as they are gained. The pressures to edge towards the more commercial, to safeguard the company rather than the industry it was formed to assist, will be enormous.

'The only real test of our ability to succeed is whether or not we can attract enough customers.'

**Richard Luce,
Minister for the Arts, 1987**

The essential paradox remains, that British Screen is expected to operate on a commercial basis, and yet not aim to

maximise its profits. How such a policy would be maintained in a fully privatised situation is anyone's guess. On present form this Government can hardly be relied on to support British Screen against the influence of those who might be expected to promote an ever more commercial approach. As it is, Relph's dictum that 'if a film is more risky it probably means that I'm putting less into it' skates over the likelihood that it is the risky projects that most need his help—and may be of most cultural importance.

Hassan's policy had been never to offer less than 25 per cent of a film's costs on the grounds that anyone who could find 75 per cent could probably find the rest as well. This may no longer be true, but it is still arguable that financial safety is cultural insignificance. And if British Screen does not have a cultural role it is nothing.

Relph of course is well aware of this dilemma. As a producer himself he has wrestled with the puzzles posed by the precarious relationship between art and commerce throughout his career. His task is to prove that the 'degree of freedom' he feels privatisation has brought has not been purchased at too high a cost. In a real sense 'everything depends on the quality of what is offered to me . . . I can only make what is presented'; but as long as British Screen's approach allows it to support projects as experimental as Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*, a riskier prospect than anything the NFFC was in a position to back, but 'within the limits of its budget perfectly commercial', then complaints will be few. Should Relph's tightrope act fail, the effects will be felt throughout the British film industry. ■

Making Waves, a British Screen/Channel 4 short directed by Jenny Wilkes.



Andrew Sinclair

End Credits: **SAM SPIEGEL**



'A producer has no equivalent in any other craft or profession,' Orson Welles wrote, 'which is one of the good things about any other craft or profession.' A movie needed a boss, and all motion pictures of consequence were the work of one man—sometimes the producer, occasionally the writer, preferably the director. When the director managed to dominate the producer, he could render him harmless. Welles, indeed, praised John Huston on his eightieth birthday celebration for always taming producers, even Sam Spiegel whom Welles himself failed to tame. 'There is not one of that most ferocious breed whom John did not cause to lie down, roll over and purr.' Yet most producers used the devious abilities which had made them producers to negate all other dominant personalities. For Welles, a Hollywood motion picture was at best 'a coherent interpretation by the craftsmen he employs of what the producer, as dominant personality, asks for but can't execute.' At worst, it was a motion picture without any personality at all (*Stage*, February 1941).

Spiegel tried to be the dominant personality in all his productions and usually succeeded. In the better films that he produced, *The African Queen* with John Huston, *On the Waterfront* with Elia Kazan, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia* with David Lean, the tension created between him and his director brought out the best in both of them and in the final film. Where he dominated, as he did Arthur Penn in *The Chase*, Anatole Litvak in *The Night of the Generals* or Frank Perry in *The Swimmer*, the results were disastrous. After Perry had finished shooting, three other directors were called in by Spiegel to shoot new scenes or reshoot old ones, while Spiegel edited the final version himself. 'All those pools,' he had told Perry. 'Shorten them.' As the subject of the John Cheever story was Burt Lancaster swimming his way home through all those suburban pools, Perry was left with a film that he recognised as less than half his work, so thoroughly had Spiegel and his associates fleshed it out. 'Everyone was looking for the brass ring,' Perry said bitterly of his associates on *The Swimmer*—only the brass ring was what the big man Spiegel wanted.

Irving Thalberg would have done exactly the same thing, and did all the time at MGM. His genius lay in watching the rough cut of the weekly movie coming off the studio production line, suggesting a few new scenes or a fresh character or an alternative cut or another scene, and thus reshaping the final film. David Selznick could do that and Sam Goldwyn. So could Alexander Korda and Darryl Zanuck. John Ford, in fact, had so much confidence in Zanuck that he let his producer invent and shoot the last scene of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the upbeat ending with Ma Joad and her family in the truck, and edit the fine cut of the film while he went off sailing in his yacht, the *Araner*.

On the two pictures which he did not fully supervise and which he wished did

not bear his name, *Suddenly Last Summer* and *The Happening*, Spiegel went off cruising on his yacht, the *Melahne*, during the shooting because he did not believe in breathing over the director's shoulder on set or on location. Yet he usually watched the daily rushes like a hawk and let the director know what had to be done about them. 'The s.o.b. doesn't understand me at all,' David Lean raged at Spiegel during the shooting of *Lawrence of Arabia*, then added, 'I worked in Jordan for five months and never saw a foot of film. I didn't have to. I knew I could rely on Sam in London to tell me whether I was getting what I was after' (*New York Times*, 1 January 1986).

Spiegel saw the commitment of a creative producer to his picture as total. 'Don't compromise,' he said. 'Once you make the slightest compromise, the slightest concession to demands by those lacking your devotion, you lose the purity of what you intended' (*New York Times*, 21 February 1983). Spiegel spent years in finding the subject for a film, eliminating the competition and preparing the shooting script. 'The blueprint is what makes a picture,' he said, 'like the blueprint of an architectural design.' It was important to know exactly what

How can you expect a leopard to change his stripes?

one wanted. If there was a secret in his winning three Oscars as a producer, it was in preparing the script and finding the right people for the picture. 'And if the script is good, you can get the right people.' Few stars refused a screenplay that had been prepared by Spiegel. Even as demanding a writer as Harold Pinter, who did the screenplays of the ultimate Spiegel films *The Last Tycoon* and *Betrayal*, spent nearly two years on each of the screenplays and recognised Spiegel's persistence and imagination in demanding rewrite after rewrite. One of the causes of Pinter's resentment was that Spiegel was too often right, and that his infinite questioning led to better results.

His scripting process over the years and insistence that his directors shot the screenplay could kill a film as well as make it, particularly when he took advice from many sources and worked with a succession of writers. Lillian Hellman first drafted *The Chase*, which was then rewritten by three other scenarists. Her comments were her usual bullets. Decision by democratic majority vote was a fine form of government—she

said—but a stinking way to create. Her modest script grew hot and large till all the ladies in it had three breasts (*New York Times*, 28 February 1966). In his later films, when Spiegel had stopped listening to advice and insisted that his one screenwriter wrote exactly what he wanted, he even caused William Goldman to do a lengthy and indifferent job on the script of *Nicholas and Alexandra*. Accused of this by his old friend, the writer and producer Eddie Chodorov, Spiegel shrugged and said, 'How can you expect a leopard to change his stripes?'

Spiegel once defined what he thought was the role of the creative producer. He was what might be called the organiser. He saw a story, got an urge to do it, found the writer and the money and the director, perhaps helped to select the actors, brought everybody together, worried about the production, and went a little crazy. He controlled all off the set. He was the *éminence grise* of the good picture. If there was a secret in making one, the key was long, hard, careful planning before a foot of film was shot. 'You beat out everything first in your mind, then in the script, then on the drawing board, then in the camera, then in the editing. You don't just go ahead and shoot—and bury your mistakes in the cutting-room.' That was strictly for geniuses or millionaires. When asked which he was, he replied, 'What do you think?'

Sam Spiegel certainly became a multimillionaire, although he began in relative poverty. He was born in 1901 in Jaroslaw in Poland, then partitioned between Austria-Hungary and Russia and Germany. Jaroslaw was near the oil fields in the South-East Polish province of Galicia—a market town of 30,000 people, where Spiegel's father was a wholesale tobacco merchant. Most of the later Hollywood studio bosses came from ghettos in cities or towns in Poland or the Russian Pale or the Habsburg Empire, Louis B. Mayer and the Schenck brothers from Minsk and the Zeleznicks (or Selznicks) from Kiev, Samuel Goldfish (or Goldwyn) from Warsaw and the Warner brothers from nearby Krasnaskhiz, Adolf Zukor and William Fox from small town Hungary. Three million Jews left Russia and Poland for America in the forty years before the First World War. From their number would come most of the czars of the early American film industry. 'From the very first day I opened a nickelodeon,' said Adolf Zukor, the originator of the Hollywood studio system, 'I pondered audience reaction. My major concern was to learn what they liked and what they didn't like, what gave them pleasure and what didn't.'

As a boy, Samuel Spiegel saw the first American films in nickelodeons in Jaroslaw and resolved to escape one day to the dream world of California. His way there was tortuous. The tides of war and the Russian Revolution swept over Galicia many times, and the Spiegel family fled as refugees to Vienna. Samuel went to Palestine as a Young Pioneer,

laboured in the camps, married and had a daughter. He deserted his small family to become a cotton broker in Europe. The coming of sound in movies gave him his chance to enter the industry, because he had the gift of tongues, speaking all major European languages fluently.

He went to America in 1927, and worked as a translator of European plays and film properties for MGM and Paul Bern, later the husband of Jean Harlow who killed himself. Unfortunately, Spiegel passed a series of bad cheques, was imprisoned and deported back to Poland. He was hired again by Carl Laemmle's Universal Pictures in Berlin to translate its films into various languages for the European market. Spiegel's triumph was with Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which was violently attacked by the Nazis in Germany. While in Berlin, Spiegel produced his first two films, *Marriage Unlimited* and *The Unlucky Mr Five*, one starring Fassbinder's uncle, a current popular singer. On the rise of Hitler to the Chancellorship, Spiegel fled to Vienna, tipped off by his barber who was also in the ss. 'These are the accidents of history,' he said, 'that prevent you from becoming a lampshade.'

In Vienna in 1934, Spiegel produced his third film, a thriller about crooks in the oil fields called *Invisible Opponents*, starring Peter Lorre and Oscar Homolka. The anti-Semitic policies of the Dolfuss government before the Chancellor's assassination sent Spiegel fleeing again with Otto Preminger over the border in a legendary escape in which the two men continually exchanged a roll of money hidden in their coats so it would not be found on them when they were strip-searched. While Preminger went on to Hollywood to join the growing colony of German-speaking exiles working there and following in the footsteps of Ernst Lubitsch, Spiegel tried his luck in England, aiming to become another Alexander Korda. In fact, he produced a minor film, *The Invader*, starring the drunken Buster Keaton, passed more bad cheques and forged a guarantee, was sentenced for fraud at the Old Bailey, and was deported in 1936 to France, that limbo land of European refugees waiting for their turn on the immigrant quota to go north to the nirvana of California.

Spiegel's experiences in Mexico were again ill-starred. He tried and failed to produce films there, but succeeded with the backing of the government in presenting a revue called *Mexicana* at the New York World's Fair of 1939. There was another unfortunate quarrel over the proceeds of the show, Spiegel was put in gaol again and deported across the Rio Grande just as Germany was invading his native Poland to begin the Second World War. So Spiegel began his career as a Hollywood producer as an illegal alien, supported by other refugees who had become American citizens—the producer and agent Paul Kohner, William Wyler and Billy Wilder—also John Huston, who had already met Spiegel in

Suddenly Last Summer:
Sam Spiegel, Katharine Hepburn.



his London period. They all contributed a hundred dollars a week until Spiegel could produce his first American film, *Tales of Manhattan*, in 1942.

The doyen of European directors, Ernst Lubitsch, was always wide-eyed at Spiegel's perfidy, particularly in stealing all six plots in *Tales of Manhattan* from six Hungarian playwrights who were bound to sue after the Second World War was over. He was also amazed at the prodigal Spiegel hospitality at his home on North Crescent Drive where he ran a gambling and drinking club for his friends, although none of the caterers ever seemed to be paid for their services. The Hollywood saying of the 1940s was, 'Spiegel can do anything except make a picture.' To be 'Spiegeled' meant to be soothed, cajoled and conned. 'He was the Thief of Baghdad,' the writer Mary Anita Loos remembers, 'but right out in the open. But socially and in a friendly way, everybody loved him. Lubitsch loved him. All of the old boys from the past loved him.'

Their support and expert legal advice saved Spiegel from being deported back to Nazi-occupied Poland in 1943—a fate wished on him by the Lieutenant-Governor of California. Four years later, Spiegel would achieve the incredible, have his American criminal record expunged, and become a citizen of the United States. As yet, he could do anything except make a good picture. *Tales of Manhattan*, one of the first 'packaged' films with its all-star cast including Ginger Rogers, Henry Fonda and Charles Laughton, was a modest critical and commercial success, while the Orson Welles film, *The Stranger*, of 1945, Michael Kanin's *When I Grow Up* and the John Huston film, *We Were Strangers*, of 1948, were all flops. The Huston

picture about a revolutionary group in Cuba was called by the *Hollywood Reporter* the heaviest dish of Red theory ever served to an audience outside the Soviet Union and put Spiegel in trouble with the House Un-American Activities Committee, then conducting its notorious hearings, which created the blacklist in Hollywood; but Spiegel protested that he was a dyed-in-the-wool capitalist. Had not the United States itself been born in a revolution against the tyranny of King George the Third?

Spiegel took advantage of the blacklist to employ cheaply many of those on it—Dalton Trumbo, one of the Hollywood Ten, wrote the script of *The Prowler*, which was directed for Spiegel by Joseph Losey before he left for exile in Europe. Because of Spiegel's intervention on set and over the rushes, Losey became uncontrollable with rage, but admitted that Spiegel was a good producer for him at the time. Asked by the English Woolf brothers to co-finance and produce *The African Queen*, with John Huston directing Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn, Spiegel soon left Hollywood himself for London. He had not done well there. He never achieved its full respect. He was a European who felt at home in Europe. 'I just felt liberated from the pressure of the studios,' he said. 'Once you achieve a degree of independence, you make only what you really must because you owe it to yourself to do it.'

As the coming of talkies had given the multi-lingual Spiegel his opportunity to enter the film industry, so the disintegration of the studio system and rise of the independent producer gave him the chance to become the Sam Spiegel known all over the world. The federal anti-trust suits of the 1940s had forced

The Chase:
Marlon Brando, Sam Spiegel.



The Bridge on the River Kwai:
Spiegel (centre) on the bridge.



the studios to divest themselves of their production side if they wished to retain their distribution and exhibition arms. At the end of shooting Spiegel's first success as an independent producer, *The African Queen*, Humphrey Bogart predicted that the major studios would disappear completely, just serving as outlets for independent productions. This was not to be, but Spiegel certainly helped the refurbished United Artists back to profit from the distribution of *The African Queen*, although they would never distribute his independent pictures again after his next disaster for them, *Melba*, an extravaganza about the opera star which had nothing to do with her. Its director Lewis Milestone growled, 'It should have been called *Melba* like I should have been christened Napoleon.'

Spiegel's next four major productions were all commercial successes and all for Columbia Pictures. *On the Waterfront* was to be the last of Spiegel's films to be made in America for a decade. His other triumphs for Columbia, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Suddenly Last Summer* and *Lawrence of Arabia*, were produced from Spiegel's Horizon Pictures and the Columbia offices in London. Spiegel had the opportunity to shoot on exotic locations, as in *The African Queen*. To him, a location added to a picture what Renoir did to peaches, a certain halo. 'In the completed picture, I sense it,' he said. 'I cannot explain it in advance. The ordeal is enormous, and sometimes in the middle of it you say, "C'mon, let's finish it in the studio." But you must resist the temptation' (*Film Comment*, April 1983).

He was no longer working under his assumed name of S. P. Eagle, for which he gave many explanations. He had taken it in a burst of patriotism when

the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and a German name seemed profane. It had been inflicted on him by the studio, which had wished his name to sound less Jewish, although Ernst did not change his name to L. U. Bitsch or Darryl to Z. A. Nuck and Billy Wilder was left S. P. Eachless. He even said that a Hollywood fortune-teller had told him that he would never soar to the heights of his profession unless he took the name of the American national bird of prey. The truth was that he was being chased by both the Federal Immigration Bureau and the Internal Revenue Service, and he needed an assumed name to work at all. S. P. Eagle was decently laid to rest in a mock obituary in the *New York Times*: 'The demise of S. P. Eagle was verified after the sneak preview of *On the Waterfront*, when it was noted that the film's credits listed the producer as Sam Spiegel. Spiegel and Eagle are, or were, one and the same man. At least, there is a reasonable certainty, shared by Mr Spiegel, that such was the case' (3 January 1986).

Politically, *On the Waterfront* had been a risk to produce. Its director, Elia Kazan, and its screenwriter, Budd Schulberg, had both testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee and had named the names of fellow writers and film-makers as Communists. The film seemed to be their personal justification for being stoolpigeons, as the hero played by Brando was a justified and martyred informer—Judas in the role of Christ. While it was being shot in New York and Hoboken, Kazan said 'it was like a public trial.' Spiegel was to use two blacklisted and uncredited writers on *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, Carl Foreman and Michael Wilson, but he used three people who had helped to

blacklist their peers in *On the Waterfront*, Kazan and Schulberg and Lee J. Cobb, who ironically played the part of the labour boss and racketeer who hated informers. 'Professional is one thing, politics is another,' Spiegel told Brando when persuading him to play the lead role for Kazan. 'Separate them.'

Spiegel's two films with David Lean proved more than anything else the value of a creative producer. Their battles with each other were as epic in quality as *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia*. When they split after irreconcilable differences, neither of them was to make major films to that standard again. To Robert Bolt, the screenwriter of *Lawrence*, filming was the biggest job undertaken in the desert since the building of the pyramids. In the Empty Quarter of Jordan, egomaniacal monsters clashed continually and wasted more energy than dinosaurs, while pouring rivers of money into the sand. He spent nearly two years writing and rewriting for Spiegel, who even got him out of gaol where he had been sent for protesting on behalf of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He was persuaded to recant and be pardoned—exactly what Henry VIII had failed to do with Sir Thomas More in Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*. 'I have never forgiven him,' Bolt says, 'for getting me out of prison.'

The making of *Kwai* took three years of Spiegel's life, the making of *Lawrence* took four. After the preparation of the script, casting and logistics were all. Alec Guinness refused the role of Captain Nicholson three times and had to be 'Spiegeled' into acceptance. And the building and the blowing up of the actual bridge over the false River Kwai in Sri Lanka was a campaign in itself

The Last Tycoon:
Spiegel, Ingrid Boultong, Elia Kazan.



worthy of Hannibal, involving forty-five elephants dragging the structure of a real railway track across the gorge, an aborted attempt at blowing the bridge which resulted in the derailment of the train, and a final success with some of the footage from the six cameras lost at Cairo airport soon after the Suez invasion. When accused of being spend-thrift in making his epics, Spiegel said that there was no story in *Kwai* without the bridge, which only acquired meaning when it was destroyed. 'So you build the bridge to illustrate your point. The question of quarter of a million dollars is only a number on your cost sheet.' As for *Lawrence*, he said defensively that he never used a thousand camels when only a couple of hundred would do.

Making *Lawrence*, Spiegel said, was like waging war—and, indeed, the subject was a desert war which had resulted in the creation of Palestine under a British mandate—and it was made in an area where Israel was fighting its Arab neighbours every ten years or so. Spiegel himself stayed out of the infernal conditions at Wadi Rumm and Jebel Tubeiq where the shooting took place at dawn and in the evenings, where the thermometers broke at 130° at noon and armies of sweepers with palm leaves expunged the footprints of men and beasts on the red dunes between takes, and where a camel cost four pounds a month to hire and its Bedouin driver one pound. Yet he did organise everything so that David Lean could almost become a mystic of the desert as *Lawrence* had been, and had to be dragged by his producer away after nearly two years of shooting. 'Making a film does get to be a drug for me,' Lean admitted. 'Once started, it's hard for me to stop.'

Spiegel stopped the interminable

shooting of *Lawrence*, which had moved its locations on to Spain and Morocco, by the device of announcing a royal premiere on an unbreakable date. The star, Peter O'Toole, thought it a master stroke. The filming had become a way of life, but they could not keep the Queen waiting. It was the other side of Spiegel's life, his incessant quest for recognition in Europe, if not in America. Because of his youthful poverty and refugee status, he longed for the respect of the great and the powerful in Europe, and he set out to acquire it. His luxury yacht, the *Melahne*, was the secret of his social success. His four major pictures for Columbia soon grossed \$100m in worldwide rentals, of which his various interlocking Horizon Picture companies retained fifty per cent of the profits. These tens of millions of dollars were spent on the yacht, on entertaining, on a Park Avenue penthouse in New York filled with Impressionist paintings, on an apartment in Grosvenor Square in London, on a villa at St Tropez, and on literally hundreds of transient young women.

'Living well,' Mrs Howard Hawks said of Spiegel, 'was his best revenge.' And through the Kennedy family, who above all knew the value of the connection between politics and film stars and celebrities, and through Grace Kelly who married Prince Rainier of Monaco, and through Lord Mountbatten and Prince Philip himself, Spiegel turned his obscure origins and questionable beginnings into a series of social successes, which he used to promote the films he made. He had friends on thrones in Europe and in the White House, in palaces and stately homes, in the bungalows of Beverly Hills and the beach houses of Malibu, and he mixed and

separated them for his own benefit and use as carefully as he cast his films. His most complete control was shown on the guest list of the *Melahne* or the seating at his dinner parties, where Henry Kissinger met Edward Heath and not William Wyler or the starlet of the moment. On board, Spiegel was the absolute producer of them all.

'If a producer is really creative,' Fred Zinnemann says, 'if he generates a project, it is important for him to run the show. But you can count people like that on the fingers of two hands. Korda, Selznick, and then Spiegel... The other "creative producers" are ridiculous. It is vanity.' It may be vanity now, but it was not vanity in the 1950s before the last of the great 'creative producers' gave way to the new breed of 'producer-directors', whose dual role gave them control of their product, which could be distributed outside the studio system through United Artists or the Mirisch Company or the other independent chains of film distribution growing on the bones of the old mammoths of the trade.

Stanley Kramer, one of the early producer-directors, recognised the value and the passing of the Spiegels of the industry. To him, a creative producer had the dream, bought the property and supervised the making of the entire film. The director was only brought in to shoot the script faithfully and usually left before the editing was complete. But leading directors would no longer accept such a minor role. 'Since the director is the hub of the picture, there will always be difficulty if you have a creative producer unless there is tremendous teamwork and rapport' (see Paul Mayersberg's *Hollywood: The Haunted House*, London, 1967). The old 'creative producers' were anyway, like the dinosaurs, doomed to extinction by their own contradictions. They were essentially lone wolves and solitary men—even Spiegel was, despite his vast acquaintance. And lone wolves could not build a film industry.

When Steven Spielberg, arguably the inheritor of the Spiegel mantle, but as a producer-director, received his rare Fellowship from the British Film and Television Academy in 1986, he said that *Lawrence of Arabia* had influenced him more than any other film for its epic scope and internal drama. Although he was praising David Lean, he was not dispraising Sam Spiegel. The epic scope and internal drama of the film was due to the symbiosis and antipathy between the director and the producer, who needed the struggle against one another to keep their creative juices flowing.

Without a Spiegel battling over the text and the details of the production, Lean went on to revolutionary soap operas like *Dr Zhivago*, only matched in its incredible stereotypes by Spiegel's own version of the events at that time, *Nicholas and Alexandra*. If Spiegel in his later years never turned out anything as expensive and trivial as *Ryan's Daughter*, he did manage the production of *The Last Tycoon*, which failed to capture the essence of the early

Hollywood that Spiegel had himself known and rejected. In fact, Lean in despair turned back to Spiegel to rescue him during the decade he wasted in trying to make *Mutiny on the Bounty*, but Spiegel could not salvage the project nor agree finally with Lean. The tragedy of both men was that, as Ben Hecht wrote, they were two Caesars with only one Alp. Yet they needed one another to give of their best.

None of Spiegel's productions after *Lawrence of Arabia* was wholly successful, either critically or commercially. His associate Eddie Chodorov stopped working for Horizon Pictures after *Lawrence* was made. 'The jig was up for Spiegel,' he said. 'He had stopped listening.' His best work was as the co-auteur of a film, testing and supporting his director, be it John Huston or David Lean. When he became the *auteur* of most of his films after *Lawrence*, his domination ensured their inadequacies. During the last twenty years of his life, he claimed to be an expert on all aspects of film-making and would not listen to good advice. 'Truthfully,' he told Chodorov, 'I would rather make a bad picture and make it my way, than make a good picture and make it your way.' But he was mostly making bad pictures at the end, because he was no longer calling in experts and relying on them.

'Who is expert?' he asked his casting director Maud Spector, and did not stay for an answer. At one time, he had picked their expert brains and shed them, or had chosen them to work for him and delegated responsibility.

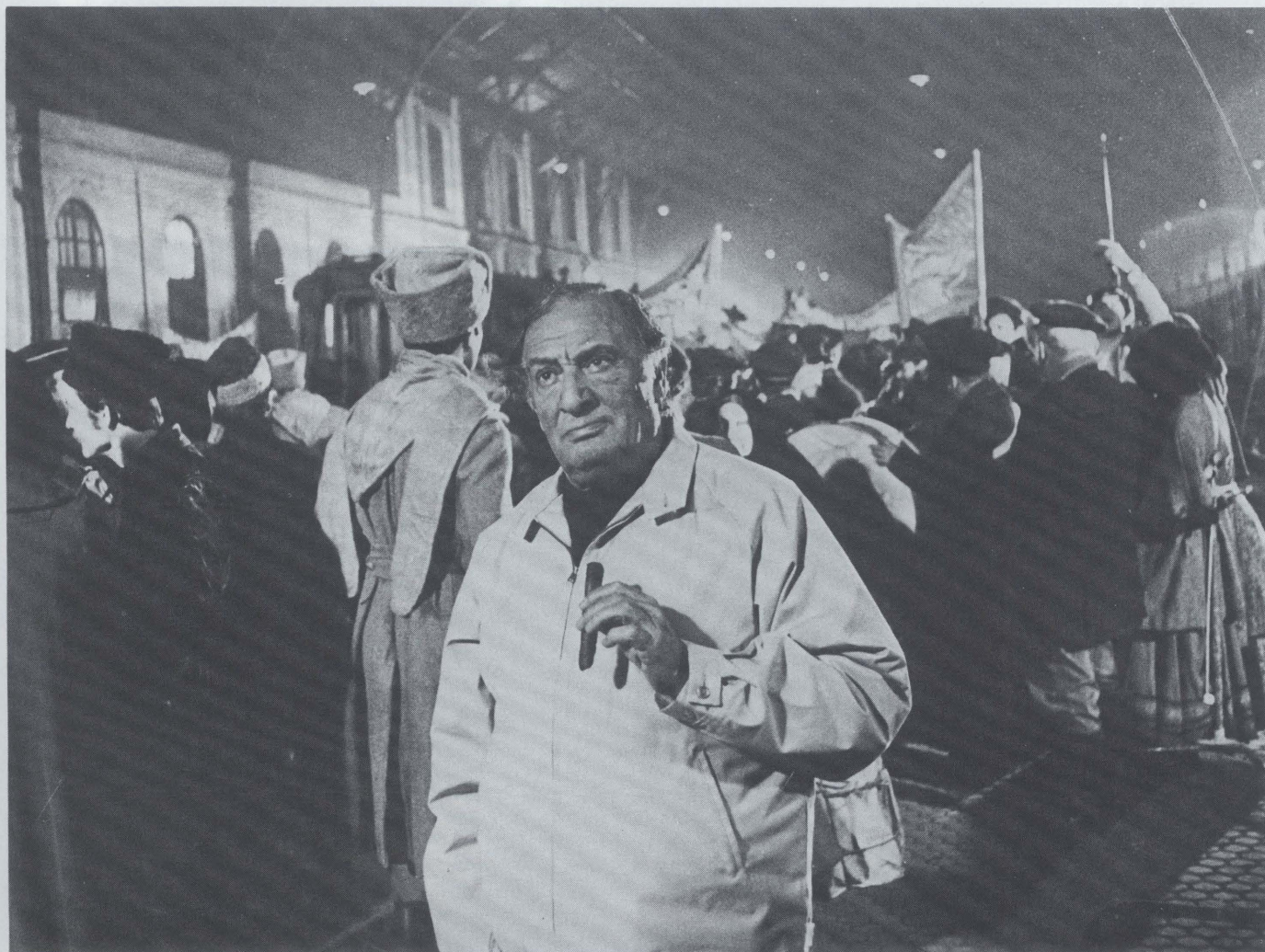
The changing of the film industry in the twenty years before Spiegel's death condemned his role and his taste. He had always felt that he had his finger on the pulse of the public. Unlike the other Hollywood tycoons, he thought a filmmaker could not overestimate the intelligence of the audience, which would always rise to the level of the film it was shown. The sex and violence films of the 70s were a shock treatment, but doomed to failure, because one always had to raise the level of electric-shock therapy, and there were no limits. Most of the new executives and packagers misnamed producers in Hollywood should be crating oranges. What had been lost from films in the age of television was 'the use of language, the beauty and nuance of language . . . People have ceased reading and writing' (*Christian Science Monitor*, 17 March 1983).

His own last production of the Harold Pinter play and screenplay *Betrayal* was full of the nuance and understatement of language. It was the only one of his films that he backed himself; it cost Horizon

Pictures three million dollars. Its subject was the betrayal of the truth in relationships and the mortality of love. It was a small but flawless production. Although he was in his eighties when he produced it, Spiegel did not think he would have to die. 'I believe in mortality,' he once said, 'but not in inflicting it upon myself.' But death came to him alone in a hotel room on the Caribbean island of St Martin on New Year's Eve, 1985. He ended as he would have wished, suddenly, alone and obliged to nobody at all.

His legacy was the last of the well-made films. As Harold Pinter stated at the memorial service in the West London Synagogue: 'Spiegel made four major films in his time and a number of other very good ones. I see the four major ones as *On the Waterfront*, *The African Queen*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia*. It is an extraordinary achievement . . . When I say that he made all these films, I mean what I say. He clearly didn't write them or direct them but he took responsibility for them, in the most minute detail, from conception to execution—all the way along the line. Total responsibility. Total dedication.'

Andrew Sinclair's 'Spiegel' will be published on 15 October by Weidenfeld and Nicolson.



Nicholas and Alexandra: the producer on set.

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FITTING TITLES

JOHN
WINCHINTON
discusses
the subtitler's art
and the threat
of Euro titles

Subtitles have quite arrived. In May 1986, there was the European Institute for the Media's 'Workshop 1: Subtitling', in Hilversum. In June 1987, there was the European Broadcasting Union's 'Dubbing and Subtitling Conference', in Stockholm.

Grizzled cinéastes may remark that for half a century spoken film dialogue has been translated in subtitles, but they are sadly out of touch. The British participants in the EIM and EBU meetings were privately told that Britain doesn't really do subtitling—and when it does, the titles are much too fast. By implication this applies to the English-speaking world. The explanation is simple. The reasons are much more subtle than the meetings revealed. The art seems virtually beyond the comprehension of some who attended.

Subtitles have arrived because some European television stations could not exist without them, and satellite television needs them even more. Up to half the material transmitted by many European stations is in English—American soaps, British comedy series, natural history programmes and so on—because these stations cannot, or will not, produce sufficient material in their native language to fill the transmission hours they deem vital. Dubbing is much more expensive and time-consuming than subtitling, so groups of translators beaver away at subtitles.

British television, like that of most English-speaking countries, uses subtitles very much as cinemas have used them: for 'foreign' feature films—we do not consider American films 'foreign'—for foreign-language television programmes and for translation of languages spoken in interviews and so on. *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Hill Street Blues*... who needs subtitles? We British may not

● I could never get
your oystermilk stains
out of me
Ben Shermans. I used
to find rusks in
me Hush Puppies. ●

understand some of the dialogue in *Hill Street Blues*, to be frank, but it works for us. And so, in this sense, we are obliged to do little subtitling compared with our European neighbours, and the audience for our subtitled films and television programme material is much the same type as for subtitled cinema films, although much larger for one transmission than it ever is in terms of cinema exhibition: heads are counted in millions.

A subtitled series such as *The Boat* (*Das Boot*) can achieve eight million British viewers for an episode, despite many of the subtitles being one second duration because of the rapid action. To put that audience figure into perspective, it is approximately the population of Sweden, or the combined population of Denmark and Norway, or more than half the population of the Netherlands or Australia. A film such as *La Vérité*, which has 1,380 English subtitles in its two hours, gets high ratings because British viewers want to see Bardot. Literate English speakers can read very quickly from television and cinema screens when they want to, just as literate speakers of other European languages can read theirs very quickly.

That is the simple bit. The subtle bit was barely mentioned at either meeting: the question of literacy. Many of the translator/subtitlers speaking at both meetings maintained that subtitles on

television had to be held longer than they are held on cinema screens, and although a variety of reasons was given I cannot recall any speaker saying pointblank: 'Many of our viewers are semi-literate and we have to cater for them.'

In Britain we do not cater for them, because in general we do not have to—so much of our output is in the native tongue. Nevertheless: 'Nearly one British adult in eight has real difficulty reading, writing or doing simple sums' (a National Child Development study, summarised in *The Times*, 3 February 1987); 'More than half of people between 15 and 19 cannot understand a simple fire notice, 44 per cent cannot interpret a bus timetable and 29 per cent are unable to deduct £1.80 from £5...' (a Mori poll, carried out for Granada's *World in Action* programme: *The Independent*, 3 February 1987); 'Of more than six million adults in the United Kingdom with severe difficulty in reading...' (*The Independent*, 3 June 1987). These British citizens cannot be part of an audience for subtitled programmes, or any television programmes with much written material.

Other European countries have a similar, or even greater, proportion of the adult population with reading difficulties. If up to half a television station's output is subtitled, the problem is gigantic, even traumatic—especially if the station is commercial and needs to chase ratings. Undoubtedly, this is the unavowed reason for a theory that subtitles must be held on screen as long as possible, ideally for up to six seconds and never less than one and a half seconds.

At the EIM workshop one participant even suggested, well-meaningly, that if actors would speak more slowly there would be more time for subtitles. Cruelly,

there was a roar of laughter from many who would rather welcome it. Next thing you know, there might be a European Community directive to that effect.

As illiteracy and semi-literacy were never advanced as the basic difficulty, I privately asked one of the dogmatists of the newly established 'subtitles for television are different from subtitles for cinema' camp to explain to me what the difference was. After all, I and my colleagues have worked in film and television longer than we care to remember and we're always willing to learn, or we'll be out of business. Perhaps not all television subtitlers would agree with the reasoning, but this is what I was told: 'In a cinema, the viewer is in a "concentrated" situation: the viewer has paid for a seat, the hall is dark and attention is fixed on the screen, there are no distractions. Watching television at home, the situation is not concentrated, the seat has not been so obviously paid for, and subtitles should be held longer on screen than for cinema exhibition, to allow for attention being distracted.'

'Tu' and 'Vous'

Having no equivalent to the formal/informal forms of address used in French, the translator must often fall back on some variant of 'Shall we drop the formal *vous*?' The literal approach runs aground in Truffaut's *Tirez sur le Pianiste*, where stress is laid on the fact that Aznavour's pianist, courting isolation and generally addressed as 'Monsieur Charlie', refuses to allow his boss Plyne to use the familiar 'tu'. The BBC2 subtitler made a valiant attempt to render the *tu/vous* irony, when Plyne finally grabs Charlie in a murderous stranglehold:

'Monsieur Charlie, permets-moi de te tutoyer.'

'Monsieur Charlie, tu vas mourir.'

'Charlie, old man, no formalities.'

'Charlie, old man, I'm going to kill you.'

I remarked that if some viewers could not concentrate at home, their difficulty should not be inflicted on all viewers, and the pace of a drama would make no allowance for that, anyway; one cannot hold titles longer if dialogue is continuous, one can only lose even more of the sense in order to hold simple texts on screen longer, which drains character from the dialogue. I believe that at home one has an ideal viewing situation. If one is seriously watching a programme and not regarding it as some sort of wallpaper one can sit comfortably with an unobstructed view, and the eye-travel from centre screen to bottom

screen to read a subtitle is much less than in a cinema. Also the electronically presented subtitles on television are usually easier to read than those on film, and they do not 'float' in relation to the picture as cinema titles tend to do.

Viewers unused to subtitled films often complain that they dislike them in cinemas because the subtitles make their eyes ache. This may well be true, because the eye-travel is much greater when viewing a large cinema screen. And a cinema is far from being without other sighting difficulties: the heads of other members of the audience frequently obscure part of the screen and it is often difficult to see the first or last words of a subtitle. One's attention is usually far from concentrated, because of the distractions caused by others arriving, leaving, shifting position in their seats, eating, coughing, cuddling—or even conducting themselves in ways more entertaining than the picture on screen. Every cinema projectionist, who has a bird's eye view of the audience, or any cinema usher, knows that an audience is in constant motion—except during sex scenes on screen, when audiences become quite still and breath shallowly; at the end of such scenes audience movement is greater than usual as the viewers relax. All this may seem a far cry from subtitling, but the all-round subtitler learns about audience behaviour and takes it into account in various little ways.

So to my mind the differences between film and television subtitling are such that viewers have a better chance to absorb subtitles from a television screen, but there is no difference which obliges a television subtitler to disregard the grammar of the programme. Titling with respect to picture cuts and so on is as important for television work as it is for cinema work, if one is to do justice to the authors—and that's our job. To be utterly pompous: we are not the authors, but we are their intermediaries, and merely applying a sort of language translation in roughly applied text is not the art of subtitling—be it for film or television.

There is an art of subtitling, as there is for all crafts. Language translation is only a part of it, strange as it may seem, as I hope this very brief exposition of 'classic' subtitling will explain.

Dialogue in film and videotape is measured and the measurements are noted on the original language dialogue list. This, internationally, is 'spotting'. Thus the texts are broken into sections, initially depending on the speed at which dialogue is delivered. If a few words are spoken rapidly, followed immediately by a few words spoken by another character, and so on, the subtitles are, perforce, of short duration—sometimes only one second. If the speech is long, the spottings follow the speech rhythms, using pauses and aspirations as stop and start points, but almost

never spotting one title longer than six seconds. Cuts (shot changes) are carefully respected, because they punctuate the action and they can be used to punctuate the flow of subtitles; the general rule is never to carry a subtitle over a cut unless there is no alternative.

Hazards of technical terms

In Chabrol's *Les Fantômes du Chapelier*, dialogue between four card-players at a café was rendered thus for a television screening:

'C'est bon. Deux sans atout.'

'Trois.'

'Deux ou trois?'

'Trois sans atout.'

'All right, two hundred each.'

'Three.'

'Two or three?'

'Three hundred each.'

These titles reveal unfamiliarity with the game of bridge. (The first player is bidding 'Two no trumps'.) Earlier a journalist remarks that the serial killer has written another letter to his paper, *toujours avec des lettres découpées dans le journal*. Subtitle: 'He writes with newspaper cuttings.'

One reason is that viewers often get the impression that a subtitle has changed when there is a picture cut, and they begin to re-read the title. But the fundamental reason is that carefully spotted titles, respecting picture cuts among other things, are sympathising with the grammar of the film or television programme and forming a whole with the authors' work far beyond the translation of words. The subtitles translating the dialogue are then written to the spottings, which indicate how much time is available for each translation.

That is the classic method, developed over the last half century in many lands for cinema and television purposes. Experienced spotters and translators have learned to accommodate various styles of scriptwriting, various dramatic constructions, picture and sound editing techniques and audience reaction—as well as language translation and interpretation. This is because the translation must be condensed and interpreted, calling for a particular skill with one's own language. Subtitlers have to spot any language given for subtitling; we do, strange as it may seem, because we have developed instincts for the rhythms and so on mentioned above, but as no one can know all languages, the translations are written by experts in the language and culture concerned, working with the picture—that is very important. Of course, there is more to it than that, but that is the essence.

In some countries, however, translators are given spottings without having the picture to work with. They may have viewed the material once, but all too often they have never seen it. So they write subtitles regardless of action and intonation. This is one reason why so many subtitles are preposterously wrong—languages with genders present an obvious difficulty: without seeing the picture, at times one cannot know whether a reference is to a he or an it, or a she or an it.

Clearly, the classic method is a far cry from the Euro television style under discussion, for which translator/subtitlers are principally engaged for a language ability, not for any of the sophistications learnt by all-round subtitlers—who, incidentally, have worked as much for television as for cinema in the last quarter of a century. Episodes of soaps and suchlike tend to arrive perilously close to transmission time, often with inadequate dialogue lists. The Euro subtitles are not spotted with any sophistication, but are usually displayed more or less in time with the appropriate dialogue. Sometimes the subtitles are written without any spotting and displayed on screen by pressing a button at roughly the right moments.

If television viewers in these European countries are content with the style, so be it. But for most of the English-speaking world that style is inadequate. It has not bothered us until now, but satellites will export it in English subtitle form and such crude work will not win viewers. However, more than a few participants at these meetings privately wondered whether this Euro style was uncritically received by its home viewers—we were hearing from some subtitlers only, or perhaps mainly from heads of departments, not the rank and file. Certainly, in chats outside the conference hall with some of the younger people who made no contribution during the sessions, I and others discovered that these subtitlers had an

enthusiastic awareness of the art, even though they were not practising it to the full.

Of course, some contributions were excellent, notably those concerning the work being done on subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, and a refreshingly jargon-free dissertation on practical linguistics in dubbing, by Thomas Herbst of Augsburg University, which was also a great insight for all-round subtitlers. It is wonderful to explore these fields, examining practical, human communications. Perhaps at present only professionals understand that dubbing is much more than lip-synchronisation, and perhaps only all-round subtitlers can savour and learn from the related play with language, from shot to shot, in strip-cartoons—the linguistic genius of Bill Tidy, Steve Bell and Gilbert Shelton has lessons for us all, for they are proven communicators, not theorists.

I did have high hopes of one formally proposed item: 'New slang expressions or local jokes should be explained in the script.' At last, I thought, the subtitlers, dubbers and translators will cry as one: 'Yes, and not only that, a full glossary!' But scarcely a voice to that effect. So I'll ride my hobbyhorse, on behalf of authors and audiences. No matter what style of titling is used, for film or television, glossaries in dialogue lists and scripts will ensure faster work, more accurate translation, and greater audience appreciation.

My last piece for SIGHT AND SOUND, twenty-one years ago (a review of the British Standards Institution's *Recommendations for the Preparation of Motion Picture Export Scripts*—and what a rush to the bookstalls when that came out), began: DEAR JOHN PLEASE HELP ME WHAT MEANS QUOTE HE IS SOME UNDERPRESSER FROM DOWN BERMONDSEY END QUOTE. So what does the quotation at the beginning of this article mean? Well, I noted those splendid lines when the first episode of *Only Fools and Horses* was transmitted by BBC TV some five years ago. Such lines get laughs on British television, they sound funny, but few viewers grasp the meaning of every word. If there was no glossary in the export dialogue list, subtitlers in other countries would be completely foxed. Oystermilk? Ben Shermans? Hush Puppies? Just imagine: Hans thinks Hush Puppies are a sort of shoe, but Christina isn't so sure, and she thinks it could be a reference to pet-food. Gunnar has found in Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Historical Slang* that a ben can mean a coat, but Sherman(s) isn't in that dictionary, or in Green, or McConville and Shearlaw, or in Wentworth and Flexner, or in Sir Les Patterson. Dialogue lists almost invariably lack a glossary. Only the best-produced USA and UK feature scripts include one.

In thirty-five years of English subtitling for cinema and television, I have

never been supplied with a foreign-language dialogue list or script which included a glossary. That is not an exaggeration. Some translators abroad who know me and know that a job on which they are working is destined for me add footnotes where they can, but that is as far as it goes.

Censoring the text

Eisenstein's difficulties with *Ivan the Terrible* are well documented. But even when Part II was at last released in 1958, the English subtitled version was not exactly a liberation. The dialogue was often selectively translated, and very sparingly subtitled in places. The hymn-like song of the 'Men Apart', as they move in procession after the murder of Vladimir, lasts about a minute, but was given one subtitle only, for the last line: '—nor self nor others sparing—', followed by one subtitle for Ivan: '—for the sake of the great Russian realm—'. In 1966, BBC TV showed the films, subtitled by John Minchinton. The hymn of the 'Men Apart' (the image of Stalin's henchmen) was: 'I swear before God a solemn oath that in Russia I will carry out the will of the great Tsar. To destroy in Russia all its evil enemies. To take upon our own hands the guilty blood. To take no pity on ourselves or upon others.'

If I sound pained, it's because I have just ferreted out, with no clues in the script, lines ripped off from Ludwig Wittgenstein—without acknowledgment, and not in the original German, either. It's true I often curl up with his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*—who doesn't?—but still it's tricky to put a finger on some lines when they arrive in English via double translation and there is a panic to get the job finished for a festival showing next week.

So if I can root here on behalf of subtitlers and dubbers who were not at these meetings, and audiences everywhere, let me urge all film-makers, television programme-makers, export sales departments of film and television organisations: Stand up! Ensure that your post-production dialogue lists are accurately transcribed, accurately typed, clearly laid out, double-spaced—and with a glossary. This will cost a little more than the unglossaried (non-glossaried? what a language!) texts, but virtually nothing compared with the cost of making the film or programme. There are many freelance, home-based workers who could earn a few units of currency doing this work, using their video machines and word-processors—and their love of language and research.

Quotations

Subtitlers are often too lazy (too ignorant, too baffled as to unidentified sources) to trace the original texts. Always irritating, sometimes downright destructive. In Alain Cavalier's *Thérèse*, a key to an understanding of the film is the fact that the offices in the Carmelite convent are readings from the Song of Songs. As Marina Warner noted in *The Independent* (20 November 1986), 'The force of these passages has been miserably lost by the subtitling, uncouthly translated without any regard for the Bible's poetry: "Many waters cannot quench love" becomes "a down-pour cannot extinguish (it)".'

The result: better translating, justice done to the work, better sales.

Oh, very well, if you insist. 'Oyster-milk' is a malapropism; the word should have been Ostermilk, a proprietary brand of baby food. Ben Sherman is a brand name; a style of shirt manufactured by this company in the 1960s was favoured by Mods. 'Rusks' in this instance means the type of biscuit given to teething babies. 'Hush Puppies' is a brand name for a make of shoe. All translators ought to know what Mods are, the word is in most modern dictionaries. Likewise, translators ought to be familiar with the use of 'me' for 'my'; it is common American and British usage.

Could Euro subtitles cope ...

Fast dialogue, cross-cutting between speakers. A child is being questioned by a TV quizmaster in *Le Testament d'Orphée*:

'Et qui est Jean Cocteau?'

'Un violoniste?'

'Exact. Et ce violoniste joue sur un violon... Un violon... un violon d'Ing—'

'Un violon dingue.'

'Non, pas un violon dingue. Un violon d'Ingres.'

Tom Milne's solution, for a version shown by BBC TV in 1986:

'And who is Jean Cocteau?'

'A musician.'

'Right. But a musician whose talent lies in... Whose talent lies in playing...'

'Playing the buffoon.'

'I think you mean bassoon. No, in playing with words.'

Other glossary-worthy items from my collection, selected for their Gunnar-misleading duplicity: a right dip-stick, twonk, stitching me up, moon-roof, little acorns, knocks 'em bandy, leave it out, your feet won't touch, mail-order course with EXIT, sling-back Wellington boots and your off-the-shoulder donkey jacket, stum, paint by numbers, he who dares wins, bonjour Trieste, I grafted, a git, I'm your social worker, get your leg over, legless, Wally, Old Bill, had it away on his toes, pranny, prodigal's return, a moody, tiffin. To say nothing of: 'The bosses never not give us nothing, so we never not give the bosses nothing.' Answers preferably not on a postcard and preferably not to the editor. ■

On 14 August 1938, the British Broadcasting Corporation televised in a scheduled high-definition public service transmission the film *The Student of Prague* (*Der Student von Prag*, Germany, 1935, starring Anton Walbrook and Dorothea Wieck). This was perhaps the first scheduled public transmission of a feature film in high-definition television history. It was subtitled.



Nostalgia.

A YEAR WITH ANDREI

Michal Leszczylowski

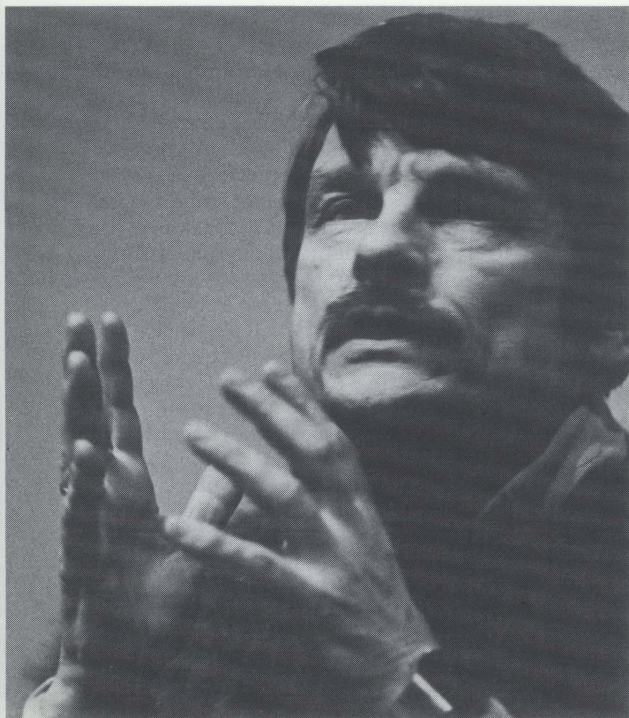
'There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.'

ECCLSIASTES 1:2

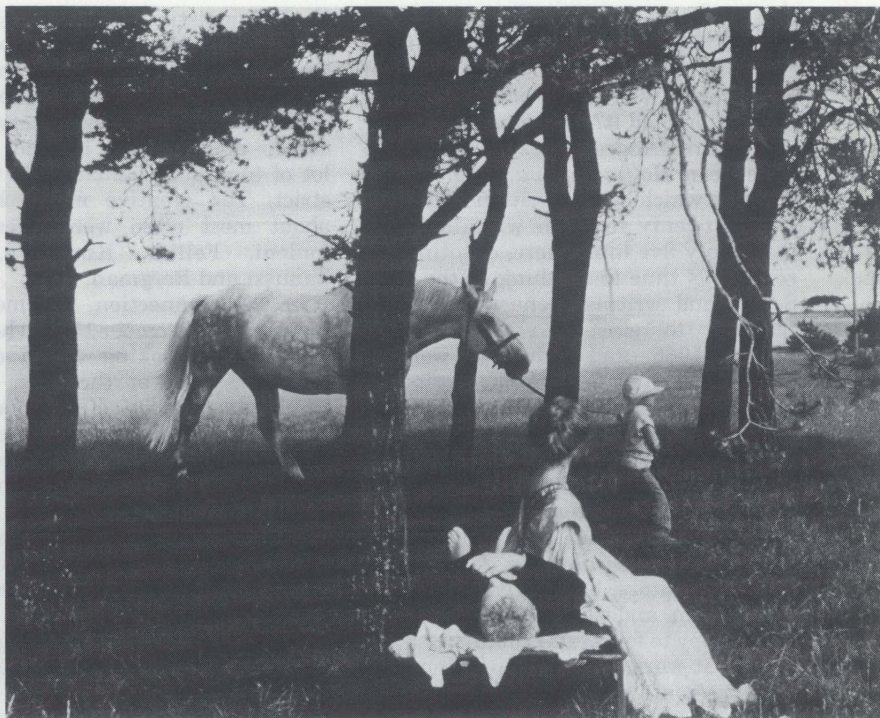
The darkness was so intense that July night that it seemed impassable and time might have stopped. Only the music streaming from the car radio and the monotonous sound of the engine were proof that time did flow. I found the Châlons-sur-Marne railway station in the nick of time. Clutching the book I was taking to Andrei and my small backpack, I got into the carriage with a sigh of relief. I asked the conductor to wake me at Stuttgart and began reading the other book I had with me. It was Buñuel's autobiography, and I wanted to report on it to Andrei. I fell asleep after acquiring the information that the old Buñuel used to cheat, taking his second

Martini before the hour appointed for this ritual. Trifles of this sort appeased the lust for laughter which had been such a feature of the year of my collaboration with Tarkovsky.

Stuttgart in the morning light was mainly glimpses in the rear mirror. I was in a hurry to reach Andrei and in that joyful haste came memories of our drive across Germany in September 1985. We drove so fast that it was hardly sensible, the car saturated with the music of Bach, Armstrong and Stevie Wonder, while we talked about faith, about politics. After five months hard work in the cutting room, we could afford to be carefree during our week's trip from Stockholm to Florence. Among other things, we talked about Conrad, who in the preface to one of his books deals with the tasks of art. He said there that the actual beginning of a work of art means severing the ties between the



Andrei Tarkovsky. Photo: Sten M. Rosenlund.



A scene omitted from *The Sacrifice*.

merciless rush of time and the transient phases of life, to waken in the heart of readers an awareness of immediate community, the mystery of all our origins and the uncertainty of life.

So I was hurrying to meet Andrei. I reached the sanatorium at 9.30 a.m. The buildings were 'modern', as Andrei defined them disparagingly, for he could not stand them. The whole place was like a barracks for young, highly disciplined pioneers whose lives were deprived of any better designs. Everything was functional, in that range of drab plastic hues. The comforting thought was that the sanatorium had a good reputation for its medical care.

When I reached his room, the Master was in bed and was, of course, talking on the telephone to his chief doctor, Professor Schwarzenberg in Paris. He smiled, waved me to a chair and invited me to help myself to a piece of cake. In his illness, his features were entirely dominated by the eyes: black as coals, with an impish spark, always moving. The moment he put down the receiver, a torrent of embraces, kisses and questions. I took the book out of my pack: *Tarkovsky, Thoughts on Coming to Rest*, a newly published anthology on his work. Andrei was not one of those conceited collectors of press cuttings, but I could see that he got satisfaction out of a book like this, and the awareness that his work was perceived and understood.

I hurriedly reported my battles with the French laboratories to ensure adequate quality for the prints of *The Sacrifice* destined for the French-speaking market. Andrei was highly demanding about technical quality, even during the bad periods of his illness. I remember the last three months of our collaboration, when he had to leave us to complete the soundtrack according to his design. He had been present during the dubbing of all the actors, except for the main

female role, which was a particularly difficult one. The original was done in English by Susan Fleetwood. The Swedish dubbing would not have been too much of a problem, except for a scene of hysteria—sobs, choking cries, inarticulate screams rendered at such a pitch that it proved impossible to do the scene again at the same 'temperature' with another actress. Andrei had found an actress whose voice resembled Susan Fleetwood's, which allowed us to use at least part of the scene's original soundtrack. He didn't, alas, have time to direct that unit. We did it on our own and in a great hurry, so that by mid-January 1986 the whole synchronised dialogue of the film could be shown to Andrei. It was then that, for the first time, we met him bedridden. He was obviously crushed by his illness, but the moment we put the video on, the Master propped up his pillows and resumed his professional role. Tides of energy suddenly surged in him. In that 10-hour working day, he gave us all the briefing for the next stage of the work.

Back in Stockholm, after talking with Erland Josephson, I decided to telephone Andrei and suggest having the role taken by another actress. His decision was matter of fact and immediate: whenever there is an opportunity for improvement, it should be taken unhesitatingly. So the dubbing of this part involved three actresses. And even I can't be sure now which cue is done by whom: they have all melded into the character of Adelaide.

We went to Paris four times in all, showing the results of our work to our Master, racing against time to complete the film. His illness had come suddenly; none of us was prepared for it. I did know that in December 1985 he had not been feeling well and had had a thorough medical examination; but I was surprised when on Christmas Eve, before

leaving for Florence, he asked me to take him to the airport. On the way, he began dictating the final version of the synchronised soundtrack, what should be the space and contrast in the sound image. He told me to change the dedication of the film: 'To my son Andryusha, whom I am leaving to fight like that,' it should read. He ignored my questions, simply saying that in all probability he would not be returning to Stockholm after Christmas and instructing me to see to the film's completion. 'Bring it to me in Italy,' he said. The day after Christmas, I learnt that Andrei had cancer. We mobilised all our resources to finish the film precisely as Andrei instructed us, to have it ready to show him so that it was wholly and indisputably a Tarkovsky film.

But on that July day in 1986, in Germany, he seemed cured, with a period of recovery in front of him. We were in high spirits, joking as in the old days. I told him some gossip about Buñuel, whom Andrei admired and had always wanted to meet. In my halting Russian, I translated for him the passage on being old, in which Buñuel deplores the loss of appetite and the resignation that the perspective of a long life left behind. Andrei reached for the Bible which he kept on the little table by his bed and read from Ecclesiastes: 'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher. Vanity of vanities; all is vanity . . .' He went through some more pages and resumed reading: 'Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.'

Religion played an important part in Tarkovsky's life and he was always eager to meet religious people, to discuss with them problems of faith. He often

felt the urge to make a film based on biblical texts, but thought himself too small a man to dare such a colossal endeavour. Who else, however, could have attempted it? We came to consider our future. Andrei's next film was to have been *Hoffmanniana*, from an old scenario which he had written in Russia. During twenty years, he was allowed to make only five films there, devoting the rest of his time to teaching at the Film School and writing scenarios. We had planned to start *Hoffmanniana* in autumn 1986—and Andrei was working at the same time on a *Hamlet* script.

He was a giant for work, and at the same time a highly disciplined man who hated disorder and would only come on the set after much preparation. Quite often I found it strenuous to keep up with his pace—which is not to say that Tarkovsky made inhuman demands on his collaborators, but to give an idea of his rhythm and that the whole team were happy to follow it. I could watch the system at work during the editing. *The Sacrifice* contains a mere 120 cuts, but each one was subject to deep critical scrutiny. Editing the film did not mean blindly following a pre-arranged set of concepts. It meant creative work carried out between the axis of a fixed vision and the inner dynamics of the material. The number of cuts gave no indication of the range of difficulties faced in the process. At the first projection, the film was 190 minutes. Further work reduced it by 40 minutes. But the only scene wholly eliminated was one in which Alexander is writing a letter to his family.

Tarkovsky held that film is the only art which can render reality in the dimension of time, taken literally. A film is a mosaic of time, and against this structure the rest of the film's elements are cast, the choice being arbitrary on the part of the film-maker. Andrei was present at all times during work on set design, costume and editing.

The same detail characterised his collaboration with Sven Nykvist. The composition of the picture, length of shot, the actors' movements within the frame were largely Tarkovsky's realm. He was the first to operate the camera and correct the actors' roles in the light of what it showed him. For Nykvist, this meant a new way of working, and he told me that it caused some conflict with the director until he realised that it did not amount to any vote of no confidence but was genuinely Tarkovsky's working method. It is also an illustration of the kinds of demands Tarkovsky made on himself—which did not in any way affect his recognition that *The Sacrifice* depended on teamwork.

We talked about the problems of the film, about film-makers and about the American cinema. Andrei had been to America but had never felt comfortable there. To him, film was art, young and free from any burden or any ossified traditions, and he felt sorry for the talented American film-makers exposed to commercial pressures which left only a few of them unaffected. Tarkovsky's European roots could not survive that

kind of artistic emigration, though he looked for inspiration to the poetry and music of the Far East and dreamed of going to India and Japan. His own choice of literature and art was very sophisticated, and though he did watch a lot of films his evaluation of them was strict. The creative minds he talked about most often were Bresson, Antonioni, Fellini, Kurosawa, Wajda, Zanussi and Bergman.

In this connection, I remember an incident in November 1985, when Andrei and I were looking at an exhibition of film posters at the Film House in Stockholm. I spotted Bergman—whom Tarkovsky had never encountered, though they had wanted to meet—coming out of one of the film theatres there. This time, a meeting looked so natural that it was almost unavoidable. The two men could see each other at a distance of about fifteen metres. What followed staggered me: each made an about turn, as sharply as though following some elaborate drill, and each made off in his separate direction. Thus the two great ones of this world passed by without touching.

Reminiscences of this kind kept us busy for the rest of that July morning. The sick man was served a lunch of greyish soup, with some greyish cereal and a piece of overcooked meat. Andrei gave me a conspiratorial wink and smile. When the nurse had gone, he resignedly waved his hand over that nourishment which could in no way be called a meal. With a final gesture, he pushed the dishes out of sight. It was with a mixture of sadness and hope that I suggested our going to France, only sixty kilometres away, for a decent steak. Andrei's eyes sparkled, but he suggested that in the circumstances he could ill afford such an extravagance. As if to make up for the wasted lunch, we took to remembering the raw fish 'sashimi' which we used to enjoy once a week at a Korean restaurant in Stockholm.

The 'culinary orgies' were part of our free time while working together, reaching their zenith in Italy where finding a good though simple restaurant was no problem. Part of the editing happened to be done in Florence. The Master, an honorary citizen of that city, treated it as his new home, and the cutting room was in the building where the Tarkovskys were staying. Meanwhile, his wife, Larissa, was controlling the practical aspects of their life, having the house prepared for them to move in when their son Andryusha was able to join them. Larissa's inexhaustible energy helped the couple overcome obstacles both before and after they left their homeland. Some of their shared experiences found their way into Andrei's films—witness the finding of a home by Alexander and Adelaide in *The Sacrifice*. It is the story of the Tarkovskys' dacha, which they had left behind in the Soviet Union.

The afternoon stroll round the sanatorium was a ritual for Andrei. In the course of it, we talked about the complex nature of love described in the Book of Job, love put to such tests, such suffer-

ing, and at the same time a love that generates pain and misery. The walk took about forty-five minutes, during which we covered some 300 metres, stopping to rest on the benches scattered about the grounds. It was only then that I realised how weak Andrei had become. The illness itself at that stage was not alarming; it seemed that the danger was over, and the detail of the plans Andrei was making for the future encouraged optimism about his state of health.

Exhausted by the effort of walking, Andrei lay down and reached for the Bible, reading again from Ecclesiastes: 'To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together . . .' 'Do you remember,' Andrei asked, 'that I wanted our film to carry that title, "A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together?" It somehow didn't sound right in Swedish.' Tarkovsky lay there looking at the icon on the wall of his sanatorium room. The humming of the forest and the sounds of swallows replaced the sound of his words. After a time, he resumed his reading: ' . . . I have seen the travail, which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made everything beautiful in his time; also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find the work God maketh from the beginning to the end.'

Andrei set the Bible aside, pulled up the blanket, pedantically smoothed it, and silence fell again. It was not the silence of a void; it was a silence full of deep reflection. The entry of the nurse, bringing tea and biscuits with Andrei's medicine, brought me back to the sad reality moving to the rhythm of its own existence. She took away Andrei's discarded soup, wished him goodnight, and asked in the same breath whether he needed anything—all in a mixture of German, Italian and English. Andrei nodded, and at the same time said in Russian to me that the only thing he needed was to go to Italy, the rest being unnecessary. It was getting dark when the time came for me to leave. We embraced and kissed, saying 'See you soon in Italy.' And that was our last meeting, on 26 July 1986.

'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity.' On the day of his funeral, in the Church of St Sergius in Paris, we were holding candles and bidding farewell to the great artist. The priest lit his candle and forwarded its flame to the people standing in the front row. They in turn passed the flame on, so that finally all the candles crowned with small dancing lights made a chain of our memory of Andrei Tarkovsky. ■

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Tom Milne

Angels and MINISTERS

This autumn, some three years too late according to certain sources, solemnities are under way for Robert Bresson's 80th birthday celebrations. Revisiting his earlier work for the occasion from the more immediate vantage point of *Lancelot du Lac*, *Le Diable, probablement* and *L'Argent* is a little like finding oneself voyaging in a strangely familiar unknown land. The first impression, not unnaturally, is amazement at the stoic sacrifice Bresson made in deliberately depriving his work, from his third feature onwards, of such incisively stylish dialoguists as Jean Giraudoux (*Les Anges du péché*) and Jean Cocteau (*Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*).

One of the great moments in *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* concludes

the urbanely painful scene in which Maria Casarès, visited by the lover she suspects of infidelity and who is clearly casting around for a civilised confessional gambit, skilfully baits a trap with an elegantly phrased lie ('Mon cœur se détache de vous') suggesting that she, too, is approaching the end of the affair. Relieved, he duly confesses and departs; and the screen almost explodes in sulphurous venom as she hisses to camera, '*Je me vengerai*'. Subsequently, Bresson had no need of those three words, or of the theatrical intensity with which Casarès articulated them, in a film like *Mouchette*, where almost any close-up of the peasant girl insulted and injured by the world she inhabits silently conveys the same message with

the same force if without the same venom. And where, more to the point, almost every place, every face, every object, every gesture is a resounding voice added to Mouchette's unspoken cry of accusation.

Not entirely coincidentally, perhaps, that third film which ended Bresson's association with literary collaborators (and professional actors to boot) was *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, not so much a film about religion (like *Les Anges du péché*) as a religious film. Still the screen's most devastating account of the arduous ascent to sainthood, it achieves a lacerating honesty in its bleakly monotone chronicle of the young, mortally cankered priest's determination, in Milton's words, 'to scorn delights and live laborious days' in hope not only of achieving but of dispensing salvation. As such, it saddled Bresson with the tag of being an orthodox Catholic film-maker (something I doubt he ever was), and left critics and audiences forever seeking to reconcile the films with the image. When one considers *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* in context, however—a context which places *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* on one side of it, *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé* on the other—there is an unmistakable air of confection about it. Or perhaps one should say, more fairly, an unmistakable element of experimentation, as Bresson fought his way from the glittering social facade of *Les Dames* to the drab inner world of *Un Condamné à mort*.

Les Anges du péché: 'mist-laden street, silhouetted figures . . .'





Pickpocket: Michel, Jeanne and fairground reflection.

Supporting the impression of unvarnished sincerity imposed by the use of non-professional actors and 'natural' dialogue, the cameraman L.-H. Burel has recorded the happy accident of his misuse of lenses which lent the film its unplanned grey tonality, and Jean-Pierre Melville has noted the borrowing of the voice-over technique he had pioneered (in quest of this particular poetic/hypnotic interiority, at least) in *Le Silence de la mer*. Not that Bresson is to be taken to task for his use of these devices, beautifully harnessed here, and subsequently refined and perfected as integral elements of his personal language. But they do conspire to perform a conjuring trick masking the fact that when the priest finally dies, murmuring 'Tout est grâce', the film has not actually demonstrated the validity of so vast a claim. In *Un Condamné à mort*, on the other hand, *all is grace* is precisely the sense expressed by the harmony between Lieutenant Fontaine and the confines of his prison, between him and the objects which acquiesce to his will, between him and the fellow-prisoner to whom he extends his faith, that finally works the miracle of his escape. Where *Les Dames* and *Un Condamné à mort* are unmistakable Bresson films, *Le Journal* remains a Bernanos adaptation.

In his admirable essay on Bresson in his own *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, Richard Roud makes a persuasively argued case for the first five features—*Les Anges du péché* to *Pickpocket*, all 'films about redemption'—as representing the film-maker's best work. This is a view likely to be shared by those who espouse the orthodox 'religious' view, by those alienated by what they take to be the inspissated gloom of Bresson's later work, or by those left helplessly lost within the profoundly enigmatic, severely denuded interiority of his mature vision. But it is one which leaves Roud arguing, much less persuasively, against the later films on the grounds that they extend Bresson's range into areas with which he is less familiar (as

though Bresson were somehow more at home with nuns and pickpockets than with juvenile delinquents and peasant girls), or reveal a lack of unity (a peculiar charge to level against *Au Hasard*, *Balthazar*, where the harmonious healing of a dichotomy or dichotomies was precisely the point).

When *Au Hasard*, *Balthazar* and *Mouchette* made their appearance after *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* had set the final seal on the Bressonian image initially fostered by *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, that image was ruffled by widespread astonishment at the privileged rôle now granted in Bresson's world to such mundane trappings as motorcycles, transistors and, above all, Dodgem cars. True, a motorcycle had featured prominently in *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*; but then the point of the scene was that, with the young priest momentarily throwing spirituality to the winds and recapturing childish pleasure as he is taken for a joyride on the pillion, the motorcycle succinctly symbolised the extent of his worldly sacrifice. More resonantly, an almost literal reflection of the Dodgem car sequence in *Mouchette* had appeared earlier in *Pickpocket*, in a scene where Michel and Jeanne, on a Sunday outing before he finds his redemption in her, sit together at a table on a café terrace.

Reflected in the glass frontage behind them can be seen the 'whirlybird' carousel of a travelling fairground in the park across the street. It is *reflected*, presumably, partly to ensure that its physicality does not overshadow the more tenuous theme of spirituality that hovers over each of their encounters, partly to suggest that in the redemption he will discover through her such material things will be of no moment. For *Mouchette*, on the other hand, the Dodgem sideshow *is* Paradise, a briefly enjoyed respite from the miseries of her life on earth about the *value* of which, material versus spiritual, Bresson pointedly makes no judgment. Certainly, though, her eventual suicide (unless it is

a providential accident) is presented as a redemption of a distinctly unorthodox nature, a moment of epiphany in which religion plays no part. The tree which fails to stop her final playful roll down the grassy bank, and the water which closes over her head against all natural probability, abruptly put an end to her misery by offering her release from a world in which even the humble joy of a ride in a Dodgem car is grudgingly denied her.

Travelling back through these first five 'films about redemption', other unexpected features begin to emerge. Richard Roud recognises, and writes perceptively about, the 'buried erotic stratum' lurking in the relationship between the sinner and her saviour in *Les Anges du péché*, between the priest and his potential converts in *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, between the pickpocket and his victims in *Pickpocket*. What he does not acknowledge is the way the physical dominance of these aspects often threatens to overturn the more fragily anchored spiritual themes. *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*, for instance, adapted from an interpolated anecdote in Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*, works perfectly as a razor-sharp *conte cruel* in which a woman of fashion exacts the perfect revenge on her faithless lover by sending him across the tracks to find the love of his life, inflicting the ultimate barb of social humiliation when she informs him, after the wedding, 'You have married a tart.' The conclusion, hoisting her with her own petard when true love redeems all, is beautifully done, but seems somehow tacked-on after the almost tangible evocation of purely physical desire simultaneously stoked up and banked down by the cruel machinations of Casarès.

Even more pertinently, despite the fact that it boasts a priest (albeit one with literary pretensions) as the first of its credited scriptwriters, *Les Anges du péché* focuses a distinctly secular eye on life within a convent's walls. The opening shots, with Philippe Agostini's camerawork obeying a high-contrast aesthetic temporarily outlawed from Bresson's vision after the revelation of Burel's starker monotones on *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, admire what they see rather than record it as familiar, everyday experience: exquisitely composed shots of the convent walls and courtyard bathed in moonlight, of the deserted white corridor as a nun makes her measured way down it to rouse her sisters, of the shafts of moonlight geometrically transversing the passage as each door opens in turn to the placid summons of an 'Ave Maria'.

The secular approach is to some extent justified by the fact that the Sisters of Bethany are a Dominican order devoted to the rehabilitation of fallen or criminally convicted women. But *Les Anges du péché* boldly ventures beyond that justification with a bizarrely effective opening sequence in which the Mother Superior, planning a rescue operation on the telephone and in conclave

with her lieutenants, behaves exactly like a criminal mastermind laying out a robbery plan for the benefit of his gang; a scene which has its appropriate but equally bizarre sequels in the Carné/Prévert imagery (mist-laden street, silhouetted figures, a warning whistle in the night) as the girl released from prison is spirited away from the unwanted attentions of a possibly vengeful 'protector', and the pure *film noir* conception of the scene in which the murderess who is ultimately to be redeemed coldly guns down the man who done her wrong. The result is an almost operatic tension between the dominant theme of spiritual redemption and the melodic counterpoint of perverse sexuality, an intricate underlying pattern of sexual jealousies and frustrations. In context, as the novice nun pursues her frenzied efforts to drag her sister soul the murderess to salvation, the probability that she is moved by profane longings seems more persuasive than the possibility that she is inspired by divine revelation.

Most strikingly of all, seen in the context of Bresson's later work, *Pickpocket* can now be seen to embody a contradiction of sorts in that what one should sense as a mystical experience—Michel's miraculous redemption by Jeanne—actually emerges much more strongly during the moments of revelation where Michel discovers the art of picking pockets: the extraordinary documentary montages which punctuate the film as Michel is initiated into, becomes skilled in and begins to practise its mysteries. There is here a secret inner intensity, a sense of communion as watches and wallets eagerly comply with the conjurations of human hands, which suggests that Michel has become reconciled with the world with which he had previously been at war. One can, of course, argue that these sequences represent the lure of criminality for Michel, or even that their implications of forced penetration point to a repressed sexuality. It seems more likely that, in loosely adapting Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* as a basis for *Pickpocket*, Bresson intended these montages to represent an equivalent to Raskolnikov's triumphant realisation that the commission of murder has indeed made of him an exceptional being, the *Übermensch* of his social theory. If so, given the way Bresson subsequently began to codify the mysterious avenues of non-verbal communication that lie between objects, gestures and veiled glances, perfecting his system into a language with *Au Hasard*, *Balthazar* and *Mouchette*, he must have realised that he was on to something with these *Pickpocket* montages, even if not quite what he had originally intended.

Actually, the first tentative intimation of Bresson's future interest in an alternative method of communication can perhaps be discerned as early as *Les Anges du péché*. In the scene already referred to, where the Mother Superior puts her rescue plan into operation and collects the young woman released from



Mouchette: paradise on the Dodge cars.

prison, there is a brief but striking dialogue exchange. The Mother Superior (Sylvie) asks the girl whether anyone has inquired about her, tried to see or write to her. She articulates rapidly but precisely; Agnès (Silvia Monfort), however, runs her four-part reply ('On m'a écrit. J'ai reçu la lettre. On me supplie. On me menace') into a single breathless, toneless litany, furthermore lowering her eyes in punctuation of its final phrase, in exact premonition of the non-delivery Bresson would later impose on his non-actors. It may be purely an accident, or perhaps simply an effect of contrast with the Comédie-Française elocution working overtime around her (though Monfort was a stage-trained actress). But the interesting fact is that Agnès, though given little to do or say, remains throughout as a sort of bulwark of affection and understanding for Anne-Marie, the novice nun proudly pursuing a spiritual mission which rocks the convent boat.

This role of the passive witness was to become central to Bresson's later work, occasionally animal but more often inanimate in form—the ass and the circus animals in *Au Hasard*, *Balthazar*, the moon and the wind in *Lancelot du Lac*, the bateau-mouche in *Le Diable, probablement*—seemingly indifferent but proffering sympathy, warning, foreboding, despair as mankind goes about its destructive business. If there is a parabola of progress in Bresson's work, it is from conventional religious optimism towards an intensely personal nihilism, from the 'all is grace' of *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* to the nothingness is grace of *Le Diable, probablement*. The road he has travelled is marked by certain signposts along the way. The fact, for instance, that he came to rely less and less on his source materials. *Mouchette*, unlike *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, is Bresson first, Bernanos a distant second; and the Dostoevsky who sticks out like a sore thumb in *Pickpocket* (the police inspector is as awkwardly assimilated as

Raskolnikov's superman theories) disappears almost without trace into the worlds of *Une Femme douce* and *Quatre Nuits d'un rêveur*. The fact, too, that Bresson gradually felt able to dispense with the grey-toned camerawork which served as a sort of objective correlative guaranteeing 'spirituality'. Lustrous textures creep back, quite markedly, in *Au Hasard*, *Balthazar* and *Mouchette*; and starting with *Quatre Nuits d'un rêveur* and *Lancelot du Lac*, the richly glowing textures of stark contrasts re-usurp the throne from which they were banished after *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*.

The formal beauty of Bresson's later work, whether expressed in the bleak *film noir* sheen of *Le Diable, probablement*, the Vermeer-like compositions of *L'Argent*, or the savage kaleidoscope of glittering armour, gushing blood and green forest in *Lancelot du Lac*, is of course crucial. Here, denying the nihilistic despair occasioned by human follies, or at least offering a hope of enduring permanence, is the world of nature and of inanimate artifacts listening, watching, trying to probe the essence of those incommunicable aspirations that are expressed by the veiled glances that shyly avoid direct confrontation, the gestures that reach timidly out to each other or to the physical world they inhabit but may have lost forever. And what is the meaning of those secret messages given and received? Ay, well, there's the rub for the critic, since Bresson's language was specifically designed to circumvent words. But the answer is there in the films themselves, clear to read if you have the eyes to see.

Financial backing, it seems, is ready and waiting for Bresson to realise his long-cherished *Genesis* project, should he so desire (one stumbling-block evidently being the perennial difficulty of directing animals, essential to his conception). If made, it may perhaps go some way to providing a Bresson lexicon. In the beginning, after all, was the Word. ■

ENGLISH MANNERS

'If there is an auteur involved,' Paddy Chayefsky observed, reacting testily to the cult of the director, 'it's as often as not the writer who is the auteur.' That was in 1974; but in mainstream cinema at least, the day of the screenwriter-as-auteur has still to dawn. (To take only one recent example, most critics—including Richard Combs in *SIGHT AND SOUND*—managed to review *Black Widow* without a mention of its writer, Ron Bass.) There is, though, one sector where the writer can expect to scoop most of the credit: British tv-backed movies, at present largely the fief of Film on Four. Whose, for example, was *No Surrender*? Alan Bleasdale's, of course. But who directed it? Ah—um—oh yes, Peter Smith. And *My Beautiful Laundrette* brings Hanif Kureishi to mind no less readily—maybe even more so—than Stephen Frears.

Evidently, the practice carries over from the traditionally writer-oriented terrain of the tv drama departments: Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective*, not Jon Amiel's; Howard Brenton's *Dead Head* rather than Rob Walker's. So it's by way of logical progression that Channel 4 should have recently afforded two leading writers a first chance to direct their own work: David Leland with *Wish You Were Here*, and Stephen Poliakoff with *Hidden City*. Over at Television Centre (where the BBC still has not hammered out an agreement with the unions over cinema release) matters are ordered slightly otherwise. Even though Alan Ayckbourn directs his own stage plays, the forthcoming tv film of his *Way Upstream* has been directed by its adaptor, Terry Johnson—another playwright (*Insignificance*), here directing his first film.

Paradoxically—though it may also be a function of the work's stage origins—this seems to have led to a greater respect for the text in the case of the non-writer-directed piece. Though Johnson has skilfully pruned Ayckbourn's dialogue, every word that's left comes across crystal clear; whereas both Leland and Poliakoff seem happy to lose an occasional phrase here and there to naturalistic mumbling. The same goes for the visuals: night-scenes in *Way Upstream* are lit for full visibility. By contrast, several sequences of Leland's film vanish into the murk, at least on television; no doubt cinema's wider tonal

range will cope with them more lucidly.

Way Upstream enjoyed a fairly splashy production at the National Theatre in 1982, both actors and audience distracted by the presence of copious on-stage water. Film comes into its own here, of course, providing lyrical riverscapes to point up the cramped conditions (both mentally and physically) aboard a four-berth cabin cruiser. All the same, the exterior locations perhaps do Ayckbourn an unintentional disservice, since the stylised social allegory he seems to have intended looks increasingly implausible set against real riverbanks and authentic duckweed.

We lead off in classic Ayckbourn comedy-of-(bad)-manners territory. Two couples have hired a motor-cruiser for a river holiday: the brash vulgarian Keith, his discontented ex-showgirl wife June, and a wimpish middle-class pair, Keith's partner Alistair and his wife Emma. Keith appoints himself skipper, and with a great show of capability sets about allotting tasks: 'Boats are a society in miniature. Everyone has a role, everyone has a function.' Much of the initial comedy derives from the gaping discrepancy between this assumed expertise and the cack-handed actuality, to which June reacts with detached abuse ('Insensitive little sex-starved ferret'), Alistair and Emma with ineffectual supportiveness laced with mild panic.

In Keith's temporary absence, Alistair manages to run the boat aground. June's desperate cries for help summon up an omniscient genie—a handsome stranger named Vince, with romantically grizzled beard and piratical grin. Clearly preferable, both as sailor and sex-object, to the alternatives on offer, Vince reveals himself to be a psycho-along with an idle-rich girlfriend, Fleur; and having ousted Keith—who storms off in fury—assumes command and continues upstream.

Upstream, it transpires, takes us out of *Three Men in a Boat* country into somewhere more like *Straw Dogs Afloat*. Vince reveals himself to be a psychopathic tyrant, humiliating Alistair, roping June (literally) into his sex games and forcing Emma, when she protests, to walk the plank, blindfolded and hands tied. The meek-mannered worm turns ('I'm afraid you're going to have to stop this, please. Sorry'); Alistair takes on

Vince, gets badly beaten, but finally triumphs. In an idyllic coda Alistair and Emma, having passed through Armageddon Bridge (*sic*) and reached 'the absolute limit of navigation', dive off the boat to bathe naked in a sunlit, prelapsarian pool.

Brief summary makes all this seem more schematic than it is. Not a lot more, though. Whether interpreted politically (the need for the moderate centre to assert itself against extremism), metaphysically (the inevitability of confronting evil on its own terms), or psychologically (a voyage back through the jungle of our base instincts to the lost innocence of the womb), *Way Upstream* leaves an uneasy sense of events, and characters, manipulated to fit a pattern. Elsewhere in Ayckbourn's oeuvre, intimations of pain, humiliation and eventual precarious harmony have sprouted more naturally from the comic groundsoil. Here, his material seems to be loaded with more significance than it can finally bear.

From a rather different perspective, the opposite might be said of *Wish You Were Here*. Based by David Leland on Paul Bailey's account of the early years of Cynthia Payne, this has already received well-deserved praise at Cannes for Emily Lloyd's resilient performance as the heroine (here called Linda), and the assurance of Leland's first-time direction. Give or take the odd flashback, it's set around 1950 in a South coast town—Worthing, perhaps, or Bognor—where the teenage Linda lives with her widowed father and smug, Girl-Guiding younger sister. The film catches exactly the peculiarly desolate seediness of the English seaside, at once bleak and claustrophobic, an emanation—since here too landscape is a state of mind—of the stifling conformity which encloses her.

Leland also scripted *Personal Services*, which took up a later stage of Madame Cyn's career. *Wish You Were Here* shares the same preoccupation with the sexual mores of a furtive society, while avoiding the earlier film's self-conscious jocularly. Linda's rebellion is seen as stemming, conventionally enough, from a need for love baulked by the choked-off rectitude of her father, absurdly proud of his Masonic status and brief moment of glory as hairdresser to Gracie Fields. Though susceptible to popular images of *grande passion* (weeping copiously over Margaret Lockwood's selfless *Liebestod* in *Love Story*), Linda realistically settles for the surer returns of sexuality, flashing her thighs at bemused cyclists and eagerly yielding her virginity to a young bus-conductor given to lemon-yellow pyjamas, inept Noël Coward impersonations and hair-trigger orgasms.

Greater erotic expertise is offered by Eric (Tom Bell), movie projectionist, betting tout and self-styled 'best bare-back rider in town'. Circling like a pike round a minnow, he closes in on Linda by easy stages, feeling her up—to her mingled fascination and disgust—in her own living-room, then lurking patiently in the shadows by the back gate until



she comes to him. Her father's near-contemporary, Eric serves as surrogate for both incest and infidelity. 'I've left him,' she announces, meaning her father, as she moves into Eric's shabby room above the picture-house.

Up to this point, the encroaching sombreness of tone seems to presage impending catastrophe, or at least a downbeat dead end. But with Linda's departure for Bournemouth and a waitressing job, the mood dissipates and the demons, off their home ground, are readily—rather too readily—exorcised. Eric, the dark sexual predator, dwindles to a limping figure on the seafront yelling hopelessly against the wind; and her father, spokesman of respectability, is worsted in public battle in the Paris Tearooms.

It's a triumph of sorts, as is her final return home, defiantly wheeling an illegitimate baby past goggling neighbours ('Yes, it's mine—all mine!')—scenes which we're invited to accept on Linda's own terms. There's little sense of the limitations of her revolt, of any recognition of sexual outspokenness as a gesture that society, for all its outraged huffing, can quite easily accommodate—along with revelations of kinky brothels in Streatham. In *Mona Lisa* (co-scripted with Neil Jordan) Leland showed an inclination to delve into that national malaise of which warped sexuality is just one symptom. *Wish You Were Here* finds him ultimately backing off, leaving us to contemplate only a subtly crafted surface.

Hidden City, now, delves below the surface with a vengeance. 'This place, this city is bulging with forgotten things

... so many things that are hidden with no reason,' mutters Charles Dance, burrowing avidly into the detritus of an obsessive society. Dance plays James Richards, 'a statistician with sex appeal', whom we first meet with all his emotional hatches securely battened, side-stepping an invitation to bed from his estranged wife, and complaining that the London where he lives 'must be the blandest city in the world'. He's plainly in need of a therapeutic shake-up, which duly arrives in the shape of an attractive young woman possessed by an *idée fixe*.

The film neatly splices two fashionable genres: the paranoid thriller, noir offshoot *de nos jours*, in which covert machinations by the state imperil those who unearth them; and the screwball comedy tradition, from *Bringing up Baby* down to *Something Wild* and *Blind Date*, of an inhibited male knocked off his equilibrium by a zany female. The female in this case is Sharon (Cassie Stuart, appealingly dogged), who embroils James in a hunt for some dusty old documentaries in which, she insists, evidence of official skulduggery has somehow become embedded. The search leads them to places whose existence James—and no doubt most resident Londoners—never suspected, while also opening up, in the process, various disused areas of James himself. At their first encounter, Sharon rips the sleeve off his jacket, and from then on the threads of his personal cocoon steadily unravel. Before long he finds himself haring down back alleys, Sharon's infant daughter clutched in his arms, with Special Branch heavies in pursuit.

Poliakoff—whose direction, like Leland's, betrays little trace of inexperience—has been well-served by his collaborators. Witold Stok's camera noses beadily down grimy tunnels far below Oxford Street where 'fifteen thousand us troops were stored during the war', roams over gigantic rubbish tips, glides along forgotten waterways. At times the tone edges into surrealist nightmare; at a party thrown by the videomaniac Brewster ('I think on fast-forward'), James drunkenly views a pirated tape of one of his own dreams. You name it, someone somewhere has it on record. *Hidden City* conjures up a society hooked on secrecy, one whose omnivorous data systems are spiralling out of control, clogged with classified information no one ever had time to classify.

'I don't think I've seen a film all the way through for the past three years,' Brewster muses. 'I feel acutely depressed if I see an ending. I prefer everything cut off in the middle.' He may have something there. The weak point of the paranoid thriller (as of its noir predecessors) tends to be the denouement. It's a problem only the finest examples of the genre—*Edge of Darkness*, *Rainy Day Women*—have so far managed to overcome, and *Hidden City*, alas, doesn't quite make it. Even less satisfactory is the closing scene, oddly cosy, with James and Sharon strolling in a sunlit park: 'I think we should follow this—see what else there is to find. There's so much more...' Perish the thought, it sounds like the cue for a series.

PHILIP KEMP

Love story

Maurice/Claire Tomalin

After the near-perfection of *A Room with a View*, which transformed an only intermittently entertaining piece of writing into a totally successful film, it must have seemed a natural move for Merchant Ivory Productions to adapt another Forster novel. *Howards End* may have been the obvious choice, but instead they chose *Maurice*, the book Forster started in 1913, finished a year later and rewrote at intervals throughout his life, but never dared to publish because of its homosexual theme. Writing the book was a releasing experience for Forster, not least because he saw it as an act of defiance against society's disapproval: this is why he insisted on the happy ending, which made the book still less publishable, still more 'corrupting'. It might be just permissible to show those who suffered from the vice of Oscar Wilde coming to a bad end, but never to suggest they could find fulfilment, and come to regard themselves as natural beings.

The film would, I think, give Forster great pleasure. Everything about it is well done: script, casting, settings, music. It is entirely faithful to the spirit of the book, which is both joyous and painful. It is a shade more humorous, which he would have appreciated, and it diverges from his finely plotted story only where it's necessary to clarify: for instance, we are shown a young aristocrat set up by a soldier, arrested and sentenced to prison—a risk faced by practising homosexuals at the date of the story (1912) which some modern cinemagoers may need to be reminded of.

Maurice (Enterprise) is in effect an *éducation sentimentale*. It combines a deeply romantic element—the notion that true love can cut across all conventional social divisions and rules, and form a basis for a permanent way of life—with a much tougher, more documentary account of the loneliness, misery, incomprehension and lack of self-knowledge of Maurice himself, a young suburban stockbroker brought up (as Forster was) by a widowed mother. But Maurice's character is nothing like his creator's. He is robust, jolly, with a liking for motorbikes and sport; not an intellectual in the least. James Wilby is perfectly cast, with his healthy shock of hair and his boyish, bumpy cheeks and nose; sometimes his eyes glow with pleasure and confidence, sometimes they register a childlike bewilderment and terror. He is always believable. So is Hugh Grant as his clever friend, Clive Durham, a young man of finely cut features and equally finely cut passions.

Maurice and Clive become friends at Cambridge; from being absorbed in the



Maurice: Hugh Grant and James Wilby.

friendship they fall in love, innocently and devastatingly. Maurice is the more innocent of the two (his public school had been going through a period of savage policing). When Clive declares himself, his immediate reaction is to express horror, because the idea is outside his mental range. Then, almost immediately, he understands that he is also in love. Clive, always dominant, insists that their love must be platonic, however passionate and exclusive. There are hugs, kisses, long looks, intensities, but all within the limit imposed by Clive and accepted by Maurice.

It's not difficult to bring out the idyllic quality of Cambridge on film (getting rid of the tourists must be the hardest part), and James Ivory and Pierre Lhomme (director of photography) make the most of the opportunity, alternating lovely cunning shots of pinnacles, windows and gateways with wide views of courts, chapel and the gorgeously candlelit hall, where Clive speaks a long Latin grace. There is even a punting scene, which may seem to pile it on; but this is undeniably the way in which undergraduate life *does* remain in the memory, the beauty of the setting forever associated with the short years of intense friendship, endless talk, intellectual and emotional discovery. In another film it could be an indulgence; here, it is an essential part of the subject, because Cambridge both brings Maurice self-knowledge for the first time, and punishes him for the first time. He is sent down for failing to apologise to the Dean, who has caught him flagrantly

cutting lectures for an outing with Clive. Maurice won't apologise, despite his mother's tears; he is prepared to suffer, to become an outlaw.

The rest of the film is devoted to Maurice's increasing awareness of himself as outlaw, while Clive moves gracefully into orthodoxy. He is heir to a country estate; he is expected to go into parliament; his family are eager for him to marry, etc. But deeper than any of these is his own wish to conform. In Forster's book he experiences a genuine change, and begins to desire women rather than men; the film makes Clive's change more willed, but the effect on Maurice is the same. He is out in the wilderness alone now, suffering torments of loneliness as well as unsatisfied lust.

Can one believe in the resolution, with Clive's good-looking young gamekeeper Alec (Rupert Graves) climbing a ladder to seduce Maurice, then overcoming other problems, including his fears of blackmail, and the two lovers agreeing to give up their respective lives and settle somewhere where they can be together forever? Just about, I think, because by then full-blooded romanticism has successfully taken over, allowing a shift towards fantasy. It is not a total shift; Alec is quite substantially established as a character about Clive's house and estate (Penge in Forster, aggrandised in the script to Pendersleigh), and there are sly observations of the servants' conversations which keep up some realism (a particularly admirable performance as the butler, Simcox, from Patrick Godfrey). Besides, romantic love is a reality too, although it's easy to forget or deny it.

The film works as a double love story, in which the supposedly superior man is the betrayer, while the man who is expected to betray becomes the redeemer. But Forster's (and James Ivory's) imagination is of course much richer than this neat summary implies. A good deal of the pleasure lies in the contingent touches: Maurice's sisters practising the bandaging they have learnt at a nursing class on Clive; the two undergraduates grappling with pianola records; a bully of a doctor (Denholm Elliott, superb as ever) giving Maurice a wiggling; a joyous innings at a country cricket match; a conversation beneath a pair of five-legged Assyrian bulls at the British Museum.

Forster enjoyed writing *Maurice*, and his pleasure makes itself felt in the book, which has a confident pace and tone. The film moves swiftly too; its weakest passage, curiously, is the opening section, which has a fruitiness alien to the rest. After this it is subtle, intelligent, moving, and absorbing; also extraordinary, in the way it mixes fear and pleasure, horror and love. It's a stunning success for a team who seem to have mastered all the problems of making literary films. □

'Come, friendly bombs...'

Hope and Glory/John Pym

When John Boorman gave the first draft of the script of *Hope and Glory* (Columbia-Cannon-Warner) to his eldest daughter Telsche she tossed it back to him after twenty minutes. 'You couldn't possibly have read it so soon,' he cried. 'Well,' she said, 'I skipped all the stories I knew, which didn't leave much, did it?' (For this anecdote and an account of the background to and financing of the film, see the published shooting script, draft four, Faber and Faber, £4.95). *Hope and Glory*, the story of a wartime childhood, does it must be said chiefly register as a series of family stories. But it is Boorman's achievement to have told them with fresh enthusiasm, and to have made the film more than the sum of its parts. One is not made to feel like the polite stranger at the chattering family table.

The story itself, as filmed, amounts to very little. A grave and observant nine-year-old, Bill Rohan (Sebastian Rice-Edwards), lives with his gadabout older sister Dawn (Sammi Davis) and his serious baby sister Sue in a modern house in Rosehill Avenue in suburban London. 'Eden Park Estate', a placard announces: a spec builder's paradise. Bill dreams dreams; his miniature lead Merlin and King Arthur are, in a sense, his close-up reality. Hitler's war breaks out. His father Clive (David Hayman) is a bit of a fool; his mother Grace (Sarah Miles) should have married Clive's best pal Mac (Derrick O'Connor). In the English manner, nothing is said, but a sadness hovers. Clive, too old to become an officer, is posted to Cumbria, where he types for England, another sort of foolishness, as he himself points out. Grace and Mac grow closer: there is a wistful seaside moment when she proves she's not too old to execute a creditable handstand. The house in Rosehill Avenue is destroyed, by an ordinary fire, not a bomb. These things happen, even in wartime, the fireman says. Merlin and Arthur perish, but a charred photograph album survives, snapshots that stuck fast in Boorman's imagination.

Grace and the children move to a bungalow beside the Thames—and now we reach the heart of the matter, as those familiar with the great rivers which run through Boorman's work will recognise—where they set up house-keeping with Grace's parents, her gentle mother (Annie Leon) and her irascible, actorish father (Ian Bannen). Dawn is wed to an AWOL Canadian and simultaneously delivered of a baby. An idyllic summer passes and then Bill must return to suburban lodgings. But a miraculous bomb falls on his school ('Thank you, Adolf') and it's home to the river. Sweet Thames, run softly...

Boorman's memories of the Blitz and

his childhood are not in themselves unique (some may judge them rose coloured): the bombs yield magical playgrounds and untold treasures; an orphaned girl is bribed to tuck her skirt under her chin for a file of curious but unimpressed boys; the bulldog spirit is displayed by the Rohans as they crouch beneath the stairs during a raid, bread-knife at the ready to repel parachutists; Dame Myra Hess entertains; Bill draws nylon seams up Dawn's legs. But Boorman and his cast attack with gusto: Sarah Miles is not quite Greer Garson, but her performance, in particular, has an affecting, old-style confidence. What is perhaps more important is that this is no pinched television re-creation: convincingly real buildings burn; the hawser of a rogue barrage balloon drags across roofs with real menace. The designs of Tony Pratt and the photography of Philippe Rousselot (both of whom collaborated on *The Emerald Forest*) have sweep and confidence. 'All in all,' Boorman notes with pride, 'the multiple set covered more than fifty acres [of an airfield at Wisley], probably the largest set built in Britain since the war.'

What makes *Hope and Glory* singular, if not quite unique, is its tone. It sometimes shades into sentimentality. Boorman has acknowledged with gratitude the influence of growing up in a family dominated by forceful women and of having three daughters of his own; and he has, not unnaturally, several soft

spots. But the sentimentality rarely gets out of hand, even in the potentially perilous but in fact very funny school scenes, and it is occasionally inflected into genuine feeling, as, for example, in the night train journey back to London after the seaside outing, when Grace and Mac come close to speaking their hearts. But sentimentality is only an undercurrent. Boorman knows how to write and direct scenes which play in the cinema. He understands scale, and he has too, unexpectedly, an eye and an ear for understated comedy. Bill and his fellows recite the nine-times table in gas masks lined up along the side of the school shelter: in the mumbled litany one hears one unmistakable raspberry.

The treeless, misnamed Rosehill Avenue is not of course the Eden it was supposed to be. Paradise is the river. The real Boorman in fact came close to drowning in the Thames: 'I opened my eyes and watched the turbulent green river with considerable pleasure... I came back to consciousness with a nagging sense of regret, remembering the sublime harmony I had felt.' Bombs fall on the street and yield only smoking shrapnel, one stray bomb in the river yields a multitude of gleaming fishes. Boorman celebrates the Thames at Shepperton with palpable pleasure—a double celebration at one point, when Grandpa's car taking Bill to school passes a working film unit. The boy is caught in mystical contemplation standing with his back to the camera in the still water; Grandfather's hand folds over Bill's, guiding an oar; Bill stands in a weir vainly angling while Sue looks on seriously from a rowing boat—they have

Hope and Glory: Sebastian Rice-Edwards, Geraldine Muir.



been ordered not to return empty-handed—and then comes the providential bomb.

One does not want to make too much of this. Despite its title, *Hope and Glory* is not, like *The Emerald Forest*, a film shouldering a message. It has a lightness of touch throughout and at times a wholly infectious gaiety. Boorman finds it difficult to judge harshly: the pompous Welsh headmaster with the ready cane ('Let our righteous shells smite down the Messerschmitts and Fokkers') be-

comes in the hands of Gerald James a memorable cameo; and even Clive, who never does or says quite the right thing, is given the benefit of the doubt—it's typical that, having passed on to Bill the secret of the googly, he should forget and allow himself, much later, in a riverside game, to be bowled by his son. Boorman marking time, recharging his batteries after the traumatic upheavals of the South American jungle? Perhaps. But few British film-makers could do so with quite such assurance. □



Mauvais Sang: Juliette Binoche, Denis Lavant.

Omegaville

Boy Meets Girl and *Mauvais Sang*

Jill Forbes

The *bande à trois* consisting of Besson, Beineix and now Carax, currently acclaimed as the 'newest wave' in French cinema, illustrates how strong the example of the old New Wave remains. This is a cinema about cinema about cinema, highly derivative and deliberately so, which most resembles both the cinema of two decades ago and the American cinema it refers to in its urbanity. It is metropolitan through and through—a *mise en scène* of what in *Alphaville* seemed merely fantastic but is now often a gruesome reality.

Part of the attraction and surprise of Besson's *Subway*, the most successful of their films to date, was that in a subtle but often unremarked homage to American values it made Paris look like the postmodern playground it emphatically is not, changing the city into an environment that a denizen of London or New York might find more familiar, with subways and expressways, mean streets

and high-rise buildings, waste land, doss houses and drug addicts. It was as though a stone which is normally kept firmly pressed down on the city had suddenly been raised and the roaches had crawled out. Such a world view is the latest avatar of Coca-Cola culture. Like Besson, Léos Carax has a capacity to think his surroundings into the kind of landscape his instincts tell him the age requires, a capacity which those who saw *Le Paltoquet*, for example, will readily agree is not given to all film-makers. Both Carax's features, *Boy Meets Girl* (The Other Cinema) and *Mauvais Sang* (Artificial Eye), reinvent the city, transforming it—most spectacularly in the black and white photography of *Boy Meets Girl*—into a Utopia for the year 2000. Carax assumes the Surrealist heritage but has exchanged serendipity for the menace appropriate to the new millenium.

Few moviegoers would attend to

Carax's films for their plot, towards which the director's attitude is at best casual: if you must have it, let it be slender and preferably unoriginal. *Boy Meets Girl* is eponymously the tale of young love. *Mauvais Sang*, on the other hand, is a sort of thriller (a nuance captured in the otherwise inexplicable English translation of the title *The Night Is Young*) which is peopled by sort of underworld characters, with a vague gangster (Michel Piccoli splendid in the Eddie Constantine role), a would-be moll (Juliette Binoche got up to look like Louise Brooks but called Anna), a deceased gangster's cardsharp son, Alex, plus an accomplice, Hans, who is the only one of them who looks remotely heavy enough for the part. This crew of slightly flaccid criminals is attempting in desultory fashion to steal the only known cure for STBO, a new and fatal virus which attacks all those who make love without love.

Needless to say there is a rival gang, in the pay of a different laboratory, which is led by a demonic American woman who looks like the ageing Gloria Swanson, and they attempt to get Alex to double-cross his pals. A chase ensues followed by a shoot-out. You've seen it all before, usually starring Anna Karina and Jean-Paul Belmondo. These themes are commonplace and the use of the genre is so familiar in French cinema that we would almost have been surprised if they had not been used to structure the film. Nevertheless, Carax's skill should not be underestimated, and the insistently heavy-handed self-referentiality of comparable films—Iosseliani's *Les Faveurs de la Lune* or Deville's *Le Paltoquet*—shows that the thriller cannot necessarily be recycled with impunity, even if it is ultimately no more than a convenient narrative peg. In *Mauvais Sang*, unless one were to choose a paranoid interpretation of the film, the plot remains resolutely insignificant.

In fact Carax most resembles his predecessors, both the pre-1968 Godard and the early Truffaut, in the area in which he is most unexpectedly original, namely the emotional intensity and anxiety that so evidently run through his films. Despite what some viewers have said about youth culture, *Boy Meets Girl* is less about how to be streetwise in the 1980s than about love—love writ large and without any of the irony the title implies. In the same way, much of *Mauvais Sang* is devoted to Alex's attempts to seduce Anna, and the fact that in Piccoli she already has a lover twice her age and that she might be struck by STBO were she to succumb without loving Alex only makes the attempt more poignant. It is extremely disconcerting, because so unexpected, to encounter such emotions presented without cynicism or patronage, and is perhaps something only the French cinema now does, but the reason Carax's

films are compelling is that they combine visual pleasure with sentiment. Thus Alex's courtship of Anna is played out as a series of gags from the silent cinema but almost completely without words.

Here Carax is brilliantly served by Denis Lavant who plays the leading role 'Alex' in both films—such reiteration leading one to believe that the actor serves, à la Jean-Pierre Léaud, as a kind of alter ego. It comes as no surprise to learn that Lavant has a background in mime. His face, which is gaunt, pock-marked with acne and with narrow, deep-set eyes, is the most compellingly melancholy since Jean-Louis Barrault, whom he resembles not as the youthful Baptiste but as an old man. It is an old young face, constantly wearing grease-



Boy Meets Girl: Mireille Perrier.

paint, the sad clown of legend destined never to be successful in love. Through the expressiveness of face and body, of a language beyond or anterior to words, particularly with Lavant and Juliette Binoche but to a greater or lesser degree with all his actors, Carax goes back to the origins of the cinema as well as to a state of emotional innocence temporarily recaptured in a look or a gesture—the woman tap-dancing in *Boy Meets Girl*, the juggling sequence in *Mauvais Sang*. This is why Carax's films make Besson's look merely slick, all gloss and no substance however accurately they capture a mood, since unlike his contemporaries Carax appears able to portray a corrupt world with an innocent eye—indeed, the innocent eye of the early days of the film industry. □

The last time I saw Paris

Beyond Therapy/Richard Combs

Robert Altman's *Beyond Therapy* (Entertainment) ends its comedy of acting out, of private dramas that only seem to have meaning in public places, with what might be called a tourist pirouette. As the central duo, Bruce (Jeff Goldblum) and Prudence (Julie Hagerty) leave the restaurant where more acting out than eating has been going on, talking of marriage and a trip to Paris, the camera drifts up and away from them to come to rest on the city skyline. It's one of those conventional images for signalling a happy ending, except that this skyline is not New York, as we have been led to believe, but Paris itself—with the Eiffel Tower, most conventionally but in this context most surprisingly, parked in the middle of the shot. Since we have gone in one unbroken pan from the restaurant to the cityscape, the trickery, or the joke (like falling in love, the characters only have to wish themselves in Paris, and bingo they're there), can't be in the shot itself. It's in the way the film is set up from the beginning, part of its structure and its theme.

Altman is not ambiguous about where the story is set; he deliberately leads us astray. In the first scene, Bruce is waiting outside the French restaurant, Les Bouchons, where all his and Prudence's subsequent assignations will take place, albeit under different names. She arrives a moment later, struggling out of an unmistakable New York subway, dropping the copy of *New York* magazine which carries the lonely hearts ad from Bruce she has answered (a passerby picks it up; she thanks him; he calmly walks off with it). Her nervousness is not exactly allayed by the first minutes of conversation with Bruce: he tells her about the man he's currently living with, but that he's willing to consider marriage.

Added to which, their rendezvous has attracted the excited interest of a parrot-dressed woman dining upstairs. Zizi (Genevieve Page) is obviously French, but she seems to be in charge of a group of similarly vibrantly dressed American women, and when she can no longer stand what she sees going on downstairs, she leads them all out with a great deal of flapping and backtalking (no more American Express, protest the staff as they try to pay). Zizi turns out to be the mother of Bob (Christopher Guest), who is Bruce's current live-in lover, and when she tells him about this betrayal, Bob leads his whole therapy group in indignant invasion of Les Bouchons. Before this, however, many people have had recourse to their therapists. One of the waiters weeps down the phone to Charlotte (Glenda Jackson), who asks about his phoney French accent (he

will later prove to be her son). Bruce is another of Charlotte's patients, while next door Prudence is seeing her colleague Stuart (Tom Conti), whose therapeutic style includes an aggrieved defensiveness about his own sexuality, conveyed in a thick, Italianate accent.

In one sense, what this adds up to is a conventional enough comedy in which the therapists are crazier than their patients, with all the farcical toing-and-froing intensified by everyone's self-consciousness about their 'problems'. Bruce and Prudence's romance negotiates this new minefield, with their first meeting ending in hostile disarray, after which Bruce readvertises, under a different name and personal description, only to find himself dating Prudence in Les Bouchons again. Finally, a confused convocation of therapists and patients in the restaurant convinces them that the only sane thing is to escape together to Paris. Where, we then discover, they have been all along.

What this peculiar little pirouette, this double-handedness about the setting, does is to give all the agonising about identity an objective cast, a social reality that is itself a riddle. Either these characters are in New York, in which case all the foreign pretensions, the French food and phoney accents, are one sign of displacement and uncertainty. Or they're in Paris, in which case the 'phoney' is real and it's the characters who are displaced. This bifurcated view is a new way of opening out a stage play by multiplying the worlds it inhabits. It's also a clue to the secret processes of Altman, to the way he often seems to be taking away with one hand what he gives with the other, conferring a poignant sense of social reality on the desert chimeras of *3 Women*, or treating Raymond Chandler's hero in *The Long Goodbye* as both a knight errant out of his time and a self-indulgent slob who can't get his act together.

Philip Marlowe's situation might be relevant here, since he seems to be the Altman character who was previously

Beyond Therapy:
Life at Les Bouchons.



most out of sync with reality, and who therefore might have benefited most from therapy. And the new film does at one point deliver the therapeutic goods, when Bob, driven to distraction by Bruce's habit of complicating their life together with women, is left off in Charlotte's consulting room. She, responding in her apparently usual oblivious fashion with a vituperative tirade about gays, provokes him into 'shooting' her with the blanks in a starter's pistol. Immediately claiming this as a breakthrough, she takes him off to Les Bouchons, and puts her fingers in her ears as Bob blazes away at Bruce and Prudence, the scene turning into a delightfully funny slow-motion orgy of seeming violence as therapeutic reality and movie fantasy mesh. □

Sky-burial

The Horse Thief

Alan Stanbrook

It was touch and go whether the West ever got to see *The Horse Thief* (ICA Projects). Few recent films have exposed such a raw nerve in Beijing. In the event, good sense and the charm of hard currency prevailed and overseas audiences can now savour one of the most handsome pictures yet to emerge from the new Chinese cinema. But it was a close-run thing. Chinese audiences have been less fortunate. Even now they cannot see it for love or money.

Tian Zhuangzhuang, the director, has cinema in his blood. A 1982 graduate of the Beijing Film Academy, he is the son of Tian Feng, a former head of the Beijing Film Studio. Though he comes from the capital, his two most personal (and controversial) films—*On the Hunting Ground* and *The Horse Thief*—have been made for provincial studios in Inner Mongolia and Xi'an. Their distinguishing features are a magisterial command of composition for the ultra-wide screen and a sympathetic eye for ethnic customs, bordering on the mystic.

But where *On the Hunting Ground* is an eye-catching account of alien ritual, *The Horse Thief* often seems like a ritual itself. Plot and dialogue are minimal—a fable about a destitute Tibetan tribesman who steals horses as an offering to the gods and the retribution that is visited upon him and all his family in consequence. The story is played like a litany or a medieval morality play. Shot after shot bears the hypnotic power of ceremony rather than drama—from the twinkling of a thousand candles before an altar to the scene in which hundreds of scraps of paper are cast in the air and rain down the hill like confetti and the almost transcendental sequence of the family bowed down before a hillside

grave in the falling snow. Norbu, the horse thief, is no heir to Genghis Khan; the storm over Tian Zhuangzhuang's Asia sometimes seems closer to Paradjanov than to Pudovkin. Formally, too, *The Horse Thief* is one of the most distinctive Chinese films we have yet seen. The ritualised sequence in which the thief circles the temple breaks up the CinemaScope screen into a succession of strikingly unexpected shots. It is long years since any director made such imaginative use of the awkward letter-box frame to mask out the irrelevant and point the drama.

None of this, however, is what got its maker into trouble. Though *The Horse Thief* is a fine picture in its own right, it is hard to consider it in isolation from the relationship between China and its minority peoples or from the present edgy climate in Beijing, uncomfortably straddled between reform and conservatism. China is uneasy about Tian's film less because of its unfamiliar formal experiments than because it shows a Tibet steeped in ancient religious rites, poor as sin and still living in the Middle Ages. One of the principal rituals, depicted several times in the film, is the practice of 'sky-burials', in which corpses are dismembered, hacked to pieces and left for the vultures to pick. The theory is that, since the birds will then fly up into the sky, the deceased is ensured of a rapid transit to heaven.

Tibet (for which one may be more inclined to read the Panchen Lama, the country's Beijing-based second-highest religious leader) is said to have been incensed by this portrait of a benighted, poverty-stricken land and to have made formal protests to the Chinese authorities. As guardians of the sen-

sibilities of the minority peoples, they were bound to respond. In fact, what particularly embarrasses Beijing is the contrast between the impoverished Tibet depicted in the film and the impression of a prosperous, rapidly modernising 'autonomous region' that figures in official propaganda. Since *The Horse Thief* nowhere refers to the presence of the Chinese in Tibet, honour on that score has been satisfied by appending a form of words at the beginning of the movie to explain that the story takes place in 1923-27, years before the Chinese marched in.

The sky-burial scenes, however, were more of a problem. Willy-nilly, it was felt that among Chinese audiences these would be regarded as standing for something outside the film. Inevitably, educated Chinese would see them as echoing the description of similar scenes in a novel, written by a Hong Kong based author, about everyday life, love and incest in Tibet that has become a political hot potato since it was published in a Chinese literary magazine at the new year. Ma Jian's *Show the Coating of Your Tongue* (so named because Tibetans customarily stick out their tongues in greeting) has been branded a slander on Tibetan customs and its publisher suspended and ordered to make a self-criticism. Lest ordinary film-goers think too much about Ma Jian's book or, indeed, about the quality of life in Tibet in general, Tian Zhuangzhuang's film can no longer be seen in China. Overseas, however, China seems to be taking a more relaxed view. What at one time looked like a strict interdict is now lifted, albeit after the sky-burial scenes themselves have been trimmed. □

The Horse Thief.



Close Encounters

**A BOX FULL OF SPIRITS:
Adventures of a Film-
maker in Africa**

by **Leslie Woodhead**
Heinemann/£12.95

'I don't mind the one with the ear, but the one with the eye drives me crazy.' The one with the ear was a sound recordist, the one with the eye a cameraman, and the comment came from a Mursi tribesman in a remote corner of Ethiopia as he watched these alien intruders filming the fortune-telling guts of a goat. It was, says Leslie Woodhead, a useful corrective to the lurid details of the day's filming, though it did not stop him tetchily confiding the mood of the party to his mud-spattered diary. Exhausted after three weeks' tramping about the bush, the crew felt 'ambushed by Mursi, cows and flies'. There was much talk of going home.

That was in 1974, and Leslie Woodhead went back twice to Ethiopia to complete a trilogy of films about a small tribe of nomadic cattle-herders for Granada's ethnographic documentary series, *Disappearing World*. Woodhead has already written in these pages (Autumn 1985) about the exhilarations and exasperations of making these films. His book is an extended account of that experience, part narrative, part diary, part reflection—a film-maker's montage of his 'encounter with an alternative universe'.

The immediate challenge, once the daunting logistics of simply arriving in Mursi territory had been overcome, was how to reconcile the very different priorities of serious anthropology and peak-time television. Mike Dodds, cameraman on this first expedition, had just come from a car battery commercial at the North Pole. Woodhead found himself asking the film's anthropologist adviser to set up a continuity shot by getting a Mursi to walk away from the camera. They soon discovered that the conventions of film grammar were as useless here as the petrol they had lugged with them from Addis. The lorry which finally got them into the bush ran on diesel; the Mursi were too preoccupied with the incursions of a neighbouring tribe to wait on the whims of white men pointing things at them. At one point filming waited literally for the cows to come home. The message the crew learned was the unpredictability of making a film like



Leslie Woodhead.

this one in a new language.

As Boot might have told them, messages in this part of the world are conveyed by cleft stick. The sound recordist on the second film, eight years later, was also out of Waugh—fresh from *Brideshead Revisited*. By now, Woodhead was beginning to see his encounter with another world as equally that world's encounter with an alien technology and a different way of seeing. The Mursi were momentarily intrigued by Polaroid snapshots of themselves, then threw them away: if they could not be sold or eaten, what use were they? Looking at a postcard, they held it with the horizon running top to bottom. This clash of perspectives is a recurring and revealing theme of the book. Without forcing the issue, Woodhead confronts the ideology of this kind of film-making.

He is refreshingly honest about the irritations the crew endured, not least about the physical torment of tramping miles through the bush in unendurable heat or wading rivers full of crocodiles; and about moments when practised liberal attitudes fell apart, as when one of the crew snapped at an importunate Mursi that he should 'go away and invent the wheel or something'. As Woodhead readily admits, such on-the-spot value judgments are as much a part of making films like this as the intrusion of the camera or the restructuring of 'reality'. At the same time, and with no condescension, he reflects that value judgments about a different culture are not simply inappropriate, but likely to be overturned at second sight. In a tropical rainstorm, Mursi firesticks were more efficient than the crew's Chinese-made paraffin cooker.

The first film had been about the Mursi version of democracy, a form of open-ended, open air debate which the film-makers discovered had a complex structure of its own. The second film focused on the elusive nature of another tribe's client relationship with the Mursi. Here perhaps the book does not quite avoid that familiar pitfall of ethnographic cinema: making an individual more character than

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subject. Woodhead is fascinated by the Kwegu tribesman who forms the centre of the second film—he mentions a blown-up photograph of him which he has on a wall at home—while recognising the risk of such sentiment. But one of the values of his engrossing account is that it also provides a portrait of these people not just as television filmmakers saw them, but as they see themselves.

By the time of Woodhead's third close encounter with the Mursi—in 1985, when the world knew Ethiopia through another kind of television image—these nomadic cattle-herders were beginning to settle in one place as farmers. Woodhead had meanwhile travelled in other worlds, filming Filipino game shows, following Reagan's election circus to a place called Media. Back in Ethiopia, he found the Mursi beginning to come into contact with one of these other worlds. Their perceptions were also changing. In a forest clearing, Woodhead showed them the first two films. They took them in their stride. There was, Woodhead comments, no reason after all 'why they should preserve their isolated purity to sustain a private theme-park of unchanging Africa for a visiting television team'.

And they now had words for television: 'the tin box with people moving'.

Trying to lighten his load on an earlier visit, Woodhead had disposed of some books, including *The Film Director as Superstar*. The cover illustration intrigued the Africans, who tried to reach into the picture. 'The men looked at me and laughed. Then they threw the book on the ground.'

DAVID WILSON

Too wonderful

THE IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE BOOK

by Jeanine Basinger
Pavilion/£9.95

The key word in the title is *wonderful*. For this handsomely produced book was compiled by Jeanine Basinger (curator of the Capra Archives at Wesleyan University, Connecticut) in a dewy-eyed trance which blankets even friendly criticism. James Stewart's performance, she writes, is 'practically perfect'; Donna Reed is 'surely one of the

loveliest American girls anyone could imagine.' *It's a Wonderful Life* itself is not just memorable or accomplished, but a precious gift, a joy forever, as worthy of veneration as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Want to have a detailed breakdown of the budget for bit players and extras? Here it is, covering more than two pages (total budget, \$57,790.25). Want to see facsimiles of Capra's written notes and script alterations? Here they are, page upon page, with printed translations in case Capra's scrawl defeats you. ('Possible foreword. There's a reason in the world for even a blade of grass.') Here, in sum, is an Everest of detail, lovingly culled from the Capra files, presented with the complete final script, decorated, it seems, with every production still ever taken. (A few frame blow-ups fill the gaps.)

As an *aide-memoire* the book has obvious uses, though in this video age the heavily illustrated script seems a laborious device for reconstituting a film that can leap into life at the touch of a button. Thanks to the horror of 'Colorisation', the film can even leap into a life it never led before; Basinger's long introductory chapter simply mentions quietly that 'the film can be rented or bought on videotape'. Other contentious matters get the kid-glove treatment; only Leonard Maltin's interview with Joseph Biroc, for instance, gives full details of the film's photographic crisis. Victor Milner began shooting, then left through 'illness' (i.e., quarrels with Capra); Joseph Walker assumed command, only to leave when a prior commitment loomed. Joseph Biroc, camera operator for both men, was then promoted to director of photography and completed the home stretch. Basinger breezes over these disruptions (of which, it must be said, there is little visual sign). Her eyes, instead, are fixed on the pre-production processes, the casting, the whipping up of ballyhoo, the post-wrap parties. At times the book suggests a press release writ large.

But nuggets remain if you search, and the four pages devoted to early scripts contain most of them. The film's origins began in a brief story by Philip Van Doren Stern ultimately sent as a Christmas card to friends. The rights were acquired by RKO, and various writers tried to crank out a workable screenplay. Marc Connelly, in 1944, used his *Green Pastures* experience to visualise Heaven, and created two George Baileys—the would-be suicide, and the wealthy philanthropist he might have become—who come to blows on the bridge at the climax. Clifford Odets

tussled with the property in 1945, retaining the two Georges and blocking in the small-town atmosphere so crucial to the finished film. He also gave characters his own fanciful gift of the gab ('You amalgamated runt! George the Bad yells at George the Good'), and christened a Bailey offspring Zuzu. To read about these unwieldy, laborious early scripts is to appreciate anew the personal magic Capra gave to the end product.

GEOFF BROWN

Monstres sacrés

HEAVENLY BODIES Film Stars and Society

by Richard Dyer
BFI Macmillan/£6.95

Mrs Thatcher is a star and so is Princess Diana, and we know why—power in the one case; wealth and proximity to power in the other. These are real people whose aura is certainly enhanced by being marketed by the media but who have an anterior existence to their image. Not so film stars. They do not precede their images; they are their own icon, and this makes them as unknowable as the god they pre-figure.

Richard Dyer's latest book is a stab at explaining the ineffable. Wisely, perhaps, he has sidestepped the question of stardom and instead written three essays—almost monographs—on the social construction of three different stars, female (Marilyn Monroe), male (Paul Robeson) and ambiguous female (Judy Garland, who is ambiguous because, it is argued, her primary appeal is to gay males).

The least satisfactory is the essay on Monroe, partly, no doubt, because the literature and iconography are practically unfathomable. Dyer takes us through the steps by which Monroe came not only to conform to received notions of sexuality in her time but to contribute to structuring them, and how ultimately the personal cost proved too great. In Marilyn Monroe was enacted, or so it seemed, the argument about the relative pre-eminence of nature and culture: 'the dumbness of the dumb blonde is by tradition natural, because it means she is not touched by the rationality of the world. She is also untouched by the corruption of the world; a figure out of Rousseau . . .'. If Monroe is the spontaneous, natural being she appears to be, then she is not just a star but the quintessential star. Dyer is

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BOOK REVIEWS

a brave man even to have attempted to write about Monroe in these circumstances and my sense of disappointment is only a measure of the enormity of the task.

Paul Robeson is what Dyer terms a 'cross-over' star, namely one capable of appealing to a variety of subcultures. Robeson was an all-rounder, a hugely talented man who had the misfortune to be black but the intelligence to exploit his blackness, while, as Dyer's researches show, constantly inflecting his roles and the lyrics of his songs to counteract their inherent racism. Scholar, athlete, singer—before the era of Ronald Reagan one might have asked what such a man was doing in the movies, but in the post-Reagan era it seems natural.

As might be expected from this radical author, part of Dyer's thesis is that, because he was black, Robeson was physically exploited in the same way as female stars. He demonstrates that many of Robeson's pictures were designed not only to emphasise his looks and physique but also the alleged 'animality' of the black man as against the more spiritual or intellectual qualities of the whites. There are thus parallels, although Dyer does not make enough of them, between the implied naturalness of a Monroe and the implied animality of a Robeson. Dyer does, however, stress that the 'problem of the body' is a 'problem of capitalism' and that a consideration of the representation of black people is a salutary reminder, even in our post-modern culture, that physical labour is still a site of primary exploitation.

The general thesis is, perhaps, unexceptionable, but the way Dyer hangs it on the Robeson peg is unsatisfactory. Robeson as a figure of capitalist exploitation places too great a burden on the black man. The body is a constant theme in Dyer's work, but it seems to me that he has not yet quite found the vehicle for investigating the politics of the body, or indeed the body politic.

The essay on Judy Garland is the most effective and original. Here we enter the domain of the emotions. By advertising in the gay press in Britain and North America, Dyer elicited a series of testimonials which document the pathos of the gay experience before the law was reformed and suggest the unbearable contradictions which often continue to characterise gay men's lives. One witness wrote from Leicester: 'Garland gave us permission to be gay in public for once'; another emphasised how gay men related to her problems on and off stage; another suggested she 'created hysteria' for gay men.

It was Garland's quality of emotional intensity, Dyer maintains, her combination of suffering and strength, the tears beneath her greasypaint, the fusion of theatricality and authenticity which were the foundation of her star quality. He charts the modulation in Garland herself, from the wholesome gingham-dress girl of the 1940s, to the self-consciously camp performer of the 50s, and concludes: 'Looking at, listening to Garland may get us inside how gay men have lived their experience and situation, have made sense of them.' Thanks to Dyer, these experiences have received limited ventilation, and they certainly prove a moving finale to this oblique investigation of social and sexual politics. Arguably, the best thing about this book is its divinely inspired title. Nevertheless, Richard Dyer is always stimulating and provocative, and he researches a field where much remains to be done. *Heavenly Bodies* is going to be essential reading for all those concerned with the social construction of gender.

JILL FORBES

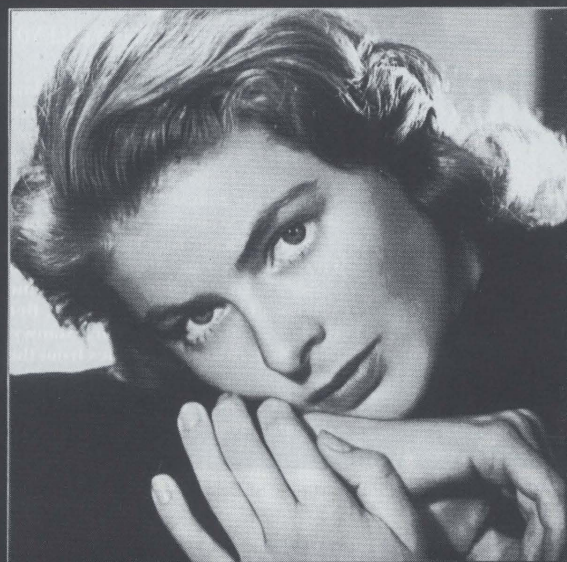
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

WILLIAM FISHER is a Paris-based writer, working in the European film industry . . . GRAHAM FULLER was Films Editor of *Stills* and now lives in New York, contributing to the *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Time Out*, *American Film* etc . . . NICOLAS KENT was founder of *Stills* magazine . . . MICHAL LESZCZYŃSKI worked with Andrei Tarkovsky for a year as editor and assistant director on *The Sacrifice* . . . JOHN MINCHINTON and his colleagues have subtitled about two thousand feature films and television programmes . . . KIM NEWMAN is a freelance film critic and broadcaster. He has recently contributed to the *Viking Penguin Encyclopedia of Mystery and Suspense* and joined *LWT's Night Network* as a presenter . . . CLAIRE TOMALIN was formerly literary editor of the *New Statesman* and the *Sunday Times*. Her book on Katherine Mansfield is published this month . . . WANDA WERTENSTEIN lives in Warsaw and works for the Polish magazine *Kino*.

APOLOGY

In Martin Spence's article on the cinema and the Brontës ('Green Slime and Devotion', *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Summer 1987), several sentences in the paragraph on *Devotion* were taken, without acknowledgment, from David Shipman's *The Great Movie Stars: the Golden Years*. Our apologies to Mr Shipman and to readers.

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LETTERS

Video censorship

SIR,—Since SIGHT AND SOUND has in past issues commented on video censorship, I would like to inform your readers about the severe measures my native country has taken against the so-called 'video nasties'.

On 9 June 1987 the Finnish Parliament passed legislation which makes it illegal to lend, hire or sell in video cassette format any feature film restricted for persons under the age of 18 (by the rating of the Finnish Board of Film Censors). Although they can be freely viewed on two national broadcast channels and on various cable networks, the films banned from private video viewing include such titles as *Last Tango in Paris*, 1900, *The Godfather*, *Looking for Mr Goodbar*, *Halloween*, *Badlands*, *To Live and Die in L.A.*, *The Wild Bunch*, *The Deer Hunter*, etc. Either these films and many others will be completely swept from video cassette circulation, or they will be mutilated to pass as suitable material for persons over 16 years of age.

To my knowledge, this is the strictest video legislation in the western world. It's a completely outrageous act of sheer stupidity, committed by a bunch of bigwigs who couldn't pinpoint the difference between the *Dynasty* television series and an Orson Welles masterpiece.

Yours faithfully
HEIKKI KALLIOMAA
Espoo
Finland

RFTs

SIR,—David Docherty's piece on RFT audiences reminds me of the old lady, a fan of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, who lamented the passing of the golden age 'when everyone had servants'. Messrs Docherty, McIntyre, et al forget that, even in the golden age of the movies, nine-tenths of 'real cinema' was pap and that many of those who acquired a taste for the one-tenth turned to the very film societies which Messrs D. and McI. reject as models for RFTs.

Of course, vicarious nostalgia is an occupational disease of many of your contributors. So is inverted snobbery, and here Mr Docherty does not provide any surprises. The process of weaning today's pap-satiated audiences from television to the meatier traditional fare of RFTs may be labelled 'educational' or 'elitist' or some other dirty word; even so, in the interests of good cinema and of the intellectual, emotional, even spiritual welfare of audiences, let's have more of it. If, on the other hand, your average RFT is to become a mere model of 'real cinema', where will today's more adult tastes be satisfied?

The days when Teddy Boys

were repelled [by an RFT] have to go.' So, consequently, may the days when discriminating filmgoers were attracted. If I want to dance to rock music I'll go to a disco. If I want to see a film about rock music (not rock-music-with-pictures but a film with something to say about the rock phenomenon) I would expect to find it in an RFT. But, snobbish though it may be, I would not want to be distracted by Teddy Boys—or, indeed, by trendy lecturers—twitching arthritically in the aisles.

Yours faithfully
F. AICKEN
Hatfield, Herts

The Monocled Mutineer

SIR,—As an ordinary televiewer, as much as a practitioner, I was interested to read the illuminating article 'Over the Top' in the Spring SIGHT AND SOUND. Those of us involved in the making of *The Monocled Mutineer* are still, I think, baffled by the Press campaign that was mounted against the serial, and by the BBC's apparent capitulation to its force.

For my own performance as Thomson, I was guided largely by photocopies of his day to day diary entries during the course of the mutiny. These were in his own handwriting and had, presumably, been provided happily by the War Office. I cannot stress too highly the care that was taken to reproduce faithfully the events of the Etaples insurrection according to available historical evidence.

I also remember, in 1963, taking part in a radio play for the BBC, *Mutiny at Etaples*. Nobody made a fuss about that, but of course it was only radio!

Yours faithfully
TIMOTHY WEST
London W18

Stills

SIR,—Glad as I was to read your appreciative obituary of *Stills* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1987) and your generous comments about my own efforts, I must correct the impression given in your article that the magazine was solely my own creation.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of James Saynor (now assistant editor of the *Listener*), who helped edit *Stills* with flair and imagination from its earliest days. Nick Roddick (now editor of *Screen International*) and Graham Fuller, assisted by Elaina Henderson, also invested a great deal of their time and energy in working closely with our contributors and refined the magazine's editorial contents with an uncompromising attention to detail.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank those people who supported *Stills* financially and those who helped the magazine in other ways. *Stills* would not have survived for as long as it did were it not for the successive financial backing of Channel 4, Goldcrest, Michael Palin, Terry Gilliam, John Kobal, Simon Crocker, Tim Chadwick, Michael Haggag and Alistair Shaw. Those people who supported *Stills* with their advice and encouragement are too numerous to name, but included such unlikely compatriots as Alan Parker, Tony Smith and Alexander Walker together with David Puttnam, Tony Elliott and Harry Evans. Their help was invaluable.

Yours faithfully
NICOLAS KENT
London N16

SIR,—I was delighted to see that the passing of *Stills* magazine has not gone unnoticed, and I was

gratified by the warmth of your tribute to its achievements.

Along with Michael Palin and Terry Gilliam, there was also myself, my partner John Kobal, Tim Chadwick, Michael Haggag and Alistair Shaw who formed the group which supported the magazine after its *Screen International* days. Although, sadly, we were unable to end the problems which ultimately proved its undoing, I will always be proud to have been associated with *Stills* and the quality it represented, as well as the excellence for which it always strived.

While Nick Kent was very much its motivating force and constant torchbearer, I would also like to draw attention to the tremendous editorial contribution and personal commitment in time and energy given to *Stills* by James Saynor, its editor, Graham Fuller and Elaine Henderson.

Yours faithfully
SIMON CROCKER
London WC2

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Mauvais Sang*, *Nostalgia*, *The Sacrifice*.

CANNON for *The Kitchen Toto*, photograph of Elem Klimov.
COLUMBIA-CANNON-WARNER for *Full Metal Jacket*, *Hope and Glory*.

ENTERPRISE for *Maurice*.

ENTERTAINMENT for *Hellraiser*, *Beyond Therapy*.

ICA for *The Horse Thief*.

THE OTHER CINEMA for *Boy Meets Girl*.

PALACE PICTURES for photograph of Simon Relph.

BOYD'S CO FILM PRODUCTIONS for *The Last of England*.

COMIC STRIP/BRITISH SCREEN for *Eat the Rich*.

MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION/FILM FOUR INTERNATIONAL/BRITISH SCREEN for *Vroom*.

PRODUCTION POOL/FILM FOUR INTERNATIONAL/BRITISH SCREEN for *Making Waves*.

WORKING TITLE for *A World Apart*, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*.

COLUMBIA PICTURES for *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, *The Chase*.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES for *The Last Tycoon*.

EDWARD R. PRESSMAN FILM CORP for *Walker*.

SKYWORKS CHARITABLE FOUNDATION/PETER WATKINS/FILM FOR FRED/SWEDISH PEACE AND ARBITRATION SOCIETY/CINERGY FILMS for *The Journey*.

ANIMATOGRÁFO (Lisbon) for *The Jester*.

GRUZIA FILM/GEORGIAN STATE TV for *Repentance*.

LENFILM for *Letters from a Dead*

Man, My Friend Ivan Lapchine.

JAPAN FILM LIBRARY COUNCIL for photographs of Mrs Kawakita at Venice Festival and in Hollywood.

CHANNEL 4 for *Wish You Were Here*, *Experience Preferred But Not Essential*, *A Month in the Country*, *Hidden City*, *Love Me Gangster*, *Visions*, *Turning Japanese*, *Chat Rap*, *State of the Art*, David Rose receiving Rossellini Award.

DAVID CHIERICHETTI for *The RKO Story*.

HEINEMANN for photograph of Leslie Woodhead.

WILLIAM FISHER for photographs of Alexander Askoldov, Alexi Guermann.

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ON NOW

●GOOD MORNING, BABYLON

(Artificial Eye)

Circa 1915, Southern California, and *Intolerance* is a gleam in the eye of D. W. Griffith (Charles Dance), who has been inspired by a screening of the Italian epic *Cabiria*. Casting about for the artists who can make his dream come to life, he sees the Italian pavilion in the Universal Exposition in San Francisco, and realises that this sense of baroque fantasy is just what the cinema needs. Two humble artisans (Vincent Spano, Joaquim De Almeida), who have emigrated from Tuscany when their father's church restoration business went broke, get themselves hired and help to make history when they design the standing elephants for the Babylon set. Apart from giving a slyly Italian look to the history of American cinema (not just the *Cabiria* influence but the charmingly neo-realist portrait of Hollywood as a burgeoning one-horse town), the brothers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani have constructed a delicate fable about creativity and the Renaissance spirit being transferred to celluloid. The delicacy is slightly thrown off by epic sprawl, and some World War One melodrama that is perhaps meant to echo Griffith's *Hearts of the World*. (Greta Scacchi, Desirée Becker, Omero Antonutti.)

●OPERA DO MALANDRO

(Artificial Eye)

In an open-air cinema in Rio de Janeiro, a man contemplates the spirit of American enterprise as represented by the Tony Camonte of *Scarface*. Moments later, he and his fellow pimps are dancing down the street like *West Side Story*'s Jets, on their way to black market dealings with shore-bound Yankee sailors straight out of *On the Town*. The year is post-Pearl Harbor 1941, just as Brazil is opportunistically switching from Nazi support to the Allied cause; and Ruy Guerra's staging of Chico Buarque's musical—a dazzling reinvention of *The Threepenny Opera*—makes wickedly intelligent use of America's made-in-Hollywood image to offer a political critique of Brazil yesterday, today and tomorrow. Not that there is anything solemn on show. Choreographed with ebullient eccentricity, boasting a tuneful score that leaves shadows of Kurt Weill craftily lurking amid its Latino rhythms, this is by far and away Ruy Guerra's best film since the strange, silent operatics of *The Sweet Hunters* (1969). Viva the musical which Hollywood allowed to die. (Edson Celulari, Claudia Ohana, Elba Ramalho.)

●THE UNTOUCHABLES (UIP)

Even at this remove, it is difficult to detach the gang-busting exploits of Eliot Ness and Co from the stentorian commentary and compacted, soot-and-whitewash visuals of the oft-repeated tv series. In the event, Brian De Palma seeks to create a fabulist view of events from an opposite stylistic perspective, with intricate decors and dauntingly extensive reconstructions of 30s Chicago displayed with mannered deliberation on the widest of screens. But lavish production values, and the bonus of Robert De Niro's grandiloquent guest presence as Capone, only go so far. David Mamet's script increasingly betrays a lack of either substance or structure, and the movie becomes an incongruous jumble of setpieces, even seeking to turn itself into a Western with a mounted shoot-up at the Canadian border. The most elaborate of these, however, a railway station ambush which becomes a slow-motion replay of the *Potemkin* Odessa Steps massacre, is brought off with enough panache almost to justify the whole proceedings. (Kevin Costner, Sean Connery, Charles Martin Smith.)

ANGEL HEART

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

A jaded private eye (Mickey Rourke) is coerced by a suave character named Louis Cyphre (Robert De Niro) into chasing his own tail round sweltering New Orleans in the quest for a missing phantom. Alan Parker stirs this voodoo brew with his customary, unrepentant vigour. (Lisa Bonet, Charlotte Rampling.)

BEVERLY HILLS COP II (UIP)

Non-stop music, surprisingly few chances for Eddie Murphy to show off his patter, and a complicated straight police-movie plot, plus arch direction from Tony Scott, make this a missable sequel. (Judge Reinhold, Jürgen Prochnow, Brigitte Nielsen.)

THE BIG EASY

(Recorded Releasing)

Slightly bent cop Dennis Quaid investigates a series of gruesome murders in New Orleans. Assistant DA Ellen Barkin, investigating the rottenness within the NOPD, falls for Quaid's smile, but still has to prosecute him. Meanwhile, the killings seem to lead back to the police themselves. Four-fifths a first-rate romantic thriller spoiled only by a pat ending; director Jim McBride at last finds a subject for his wayward energies. (Ned Beatty.)

BUSINESS AS USUAL

(Cannon)

Liverpool shopworkers Cathy Tyson and Glenda Jackson repel the unwelcome attentions of their lecherous manager (Eamon Boland), but the political struggle takes a toll on their personal relationships. Punchy agitprop straight from the heart of first-time director Lezli-An Barrett.

DIDN'T YOU KILL MY BROTHER?

(Recorded Releasing)

The Comic Strip guy the 'Concerned 80s' in this Channel 4 romp with Alexei Sayle in top form as the chalk-and-cheese East End twins, Carl and Sterling Moss, who fall to blows over a bicycle stealing racket. Slightly less manic than usual and several punches land squarely home. (Beryl Reid, Peter Richardson, Pauline Melville; director, Bob Spiers.)

EAT THE RICH

(Recorded Releasing)

Fired from the staff of Bastards, a posh eatery, disgruntled Lanah Pelley forms a revolutionary front to overthrow the Dayglo-suited fascist, Noshier Powell, who has become Home Secretary. A mean-spirited Comic Strip cartoon with more cameos than a body can stand. (Fiona Richmond, Jimmy Fagg; director, Peter Richardson.)

HAMBURGER HILL

(Palace)

More Namsplottation. A bunch of infantrymen take a hill and then complain bitterly about the hairheads back home undermining the war effort and getting off with their women. The kind of old-style war movie favoured by the US Army, but which was not being made in 1968. (Anthony Barille, Don Cheadle; director, John Irvin.)

HELLRAISER

(Entertainment)

Horror writer Clive Barker's piledriving directorial debut about a dead man with a hellish compact who gradually reconstructs himself in a spectacularly haunted house is full of artful invention: relentless pace and first-rate effects sweep over a somewhat threadbare plot. (Andrew Robinson, Clare Higgins, Ashley Laurence.)

THE KITCHEN TOTO

(Cannon)

The first stirrings of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya in the early 1950s, as seen through the bewildered eyes of a Kikuyu boy who works as a kitchen servant for a British police chief. A conflict of loyalties scrupulously charted in a first feature by National Film School graduate Harry Hook, whose impeccable liberal approach will offend no one. (Edwin Mahinda, Bob Peck, Phyllis Logan.)

THE LOVE CHILD

(BFI)

Whimsical tale of an unassuming, orphaned offshoot of the Love Generation who commutes between office Yuppiedom and working-class life in South London with Gran, until he succumbs to his forebears' dropout tendencies. Frontroom Productions' customary strength is its ability to catch the texture of everyday life in today's Britain. Here, regrettably, this is something of a side issue (Sheila Hancock, Peter Capaldi; director, Robert Smith.)

POWER

(UKFD)

Political adman Richard Gere pulls every dirty trick in the

media book to get his clients elected. A redundant exposé of too familiar evils with uncharacteristically disappointing performances from Gene Hackman and Julie Christie. (Director, Sidney Lumet.)

THE RESCUERS

(UKFD)

Re-release of Disney's less than vintage cartoon, with heroic mice voiced by Bob Newhart and Eva Gabor saving an orphan from an evil hag. The alligators steal the picture. (Directors, Wolfgang Reitherman, John Lounsbery, Art Stevens.)

SALVATION!

(Recorded Releasing)

A golddigging tv preacher (Stephen McHattie) is terrorised in his luxury home by a gang of lowlifes who want him to put one of their number (Exene Cervenka) on television. An intriguing central section bookended by dire music videos and adding up to nothing in particular. (Director, Beth B.)

SLAMDANCE

(Palace)

A stylish noir thriller, oddly teaming director Wayne Wang (*Dim Sum*) with screenwriter/actor Don Oppel (*Android*). Tom Hulce stars as an underground cartoonist mixed up in a conspiracy, but Oppel yet again steals the show as the tormented heavy. (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Harry Dean Stanton, Adam Ant.)

SUPERMAN IV: THE QUEST FOR PEACE

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

It must be getting difficult to think of world-shaking catastrophes sufficient to put the Man of Steel on his mettle. *Superman IV* comes up with the threat of nuclear destruction—topical enough but also mundane enough to require double the love interest (from Margot Kidder to Mariel Hemingway) and more overplayed comic villainy from Gene Hackman. (Christopher Reeve; director, Sidney J. Furie.)

SWIMMING TO CAMBODIA

(Mainline)

Spalding Gray, raconteur extraordinary, commits his stage recital of the tribulations of filming *The Killing Fields*, and the horrors of Cambodia's Year Zero campaign, to film. Jonathan Demme ensures there's no loss of theatrical intensity, and no awkwardness or bathos in the switches between Gray's search for the Perfect Moment and his theories of global genocide.

THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

Or *The Exorcist Comes to Peyton Place*. Jack Nicholson, playing some sort of devil incarnate even more extravagantly than usual, stirs up desire and spreads havoc in a New England village. George Miller directs Updike's semi-farical supernatural tale with disarming glee; uneven, but handsomely shot by Vilmos Zsigmond. (Susan Sarandon, Cher, Michelle Pfeiffer.)

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